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KALINGA WAR TO UNIVERSAL PEACE

THE ODYSSEY OF EMPEROR ASOKA

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Vol. - II

Manmath Nath Das

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वर्ग संख्या..... आगत संख्या.....

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Vol.-II

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THE ODYSSEY OF EMPEROR ASOKA

VOL. II

121324

पुस्तकालय
पुस्तकालय
गुरुकुल कांगड़ी विश्वविद्यालय

by
MANMATH NATH DAS

121324

HINDUSTAN PUBLISHER & DISTRIBUTORS
NEW DELHI-110059

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Episode Twenty-six

Commentary: As the time for Coronation approaches, a priestly discontent leads to a serious situation. The priests decline to consecrate the Buddhist wife of Asoka, Vidisha Devi, as she did not believe in the Brahmanical gods and goddesses. In the larger interest of her husband, Devi prefers to leave the palace with her Buddhist children, yielding place to a new queen.

Scene 1

Radhagupta's Room **Radhagupta, Tishya**

Radhagupta is in a mood of depression. Tishya Rakshita comes in and they discuss over the situation.

Radhagupta "Tishya, you appear before me as an angel of hope whenever I feel dejected. You are aware of the problem now facing me, the Emperor, and the country ! The Emperor is obstinate. He will not have his crown without Devi as his consort, and the priests will not perform the rituals of Coronation with Devi with her husband ! I do not find a way out. The date of the Coronation is fixed. Foreign dignitaries are about to pour in. What a disgrace awaits us if the ceremony does not take place ! What would the people say ?"

Tishya (*smiling*) "*Mahamantriji* ! It is so simple an issue, and yet, you do not find a solution ! I feel amused to see your mental plight."

Radhagupta "Dear naughty girl ! You call it a simple issue ! You take it so lightly when I have exhausted my thinking power to find a way out !"

Tishya "What will be my reward if I suggest the easiest method to come out of the riddle ?"

Radhagupta "Reward ! Yes, I am ready to place myself at your disposal to meet your precious needs if you show me a way to escape !"

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Tishya (*cunningly*) "Why not place the Emperor at my disposal instead of placing yourself !"

Radhagupta "It is not the time when you should play joke with me. Do reveal your mind if you have any grand idea in your fertile brain."

Tishya "*Mahamantriji* ! Let me place before you my key of solution. First, create a rift between Asoka and Devi on some issues of their respective religious and personal beliefs, such as, issues of war or peace, violence or non-violence, mundane ways of life or renunciation, etc. Secondly, when Devi will show her obstinate and blind faith in the doctrines of Buddha and decline to believe in the new deeds to which she will be called upon as an Empress to discharge, leave it to the Emperor to decide whether to rule the country with a Buddhist Queen by his side. Since Asoka will never agree to be a man of non-violence as the ruler of a great empire, he must have to think thrice if he can take Devi to be coronated with him. As he will never take Devi for consecration, the priests may suggest that without a Queen by the side of the King, Coronation will be religiously irregular. When this situation develops, you are free to suggest to the Emperor to marry a second wife who can be the accepted and consecrated Empress of Magadh."

Radhagupta "I get the idea in simpler words. Devi has herself to decline to be anointed as a Queen I think, this may be possible if we play our game properly. But, your second suggestion that I shall ask the Emperor to marry a new wife appears absurd. Asoka will never agree to have a second wife. He loves Devi most passionately."

Tishya (*laughing*) "I wonder, how you are unaware of man's instinct and nature ! Are not most men polygamous by nature Are not the heroes and kings more desirous of more women in their lives ? How many men are true only to one wife ? Those who have youthful vigour, also have the urge to marry again and again."

Radhagupta "Dear Tishya ! Do you think, Asoka belongs to this category of men ?"

Tishya "He cannot be an exception to the general rules of human character ! A female is like a flower. A flower does not run after a butterfly. But a male is like a butterfly. He likes to run after woman after woman."

Radhagupta "Remember, Asoka is a king. He may fear public opinion to behave like a butterfly."

Tishya "Did Chandragupta Maurya fear public opinion when he married the Greek Princess Athene ? Did Bindusara fear public opinion when he married as many as sixteen wives ? Why should, therefore, Asoka fear ? It is a question of how you manipulate the Emperor's thinking process to create compulsions to marry ! *Mahamantriji*, here is a test for your intelligence and ability !"

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Radhagupta "Would you not play a part in this sordid drama of great wit ? Please do agree to help me. I shall be behind you."

Tishya "For what reward, my revered sir ?"

Radhagupta "Tishya ! First perform your first act to separate Devi from Asoka. The second act of the drama will be played only after the first act is over !"

Tishya goes out with a happy face Radhagupta speaks to himself.

Radhagupta "How ambitious is this girl ! She perhaps thinks that she can be the wife of Asoka, the Empress of Magadh, and the Queen-Consort at Coronation ! No one can know the ways of a woman, perhaps not even the gods ! Once her ambition is let loose, it knows no height or depth, no horizon or sky !"

Scene 2

Night: Devi's Bedroom **Devi, Tishya**

Sitting on her gorgeous bed, Devi is making a choice of the shape of her crown from among several models. She looks fresh, beautiful, glamorous and proud. Tishya comes near her bed and sits down on the floor.

Tishya "Maharani ! I have come to congratulate you on the Coronation eve. The crown of the Empress will be made of the choicest diamonds and jewels. It will look more glittering than that of the Emperor. This is the desire of your husband."

Devi "To speak the truth, I really do not want to put a crown on my head ! I would prefer the white cap of a nun to a dazzling crown of a queen. But, I have to go by my husband's wishes."

Tishya (*biting lips*) "Maharani ! please do not utter such words before anyone. Your words will confirm the fears in the mind of the priests and the Brahmans, as well as of the Ministers !"

Devi "Fears ! Fears in the minds of others ! What for ?"

Tishya "Has not the Emperor told you anything of the storm that is gathering on the horizon ?"

Devi (*in surprise*) "No. He has not told me anything ! Please speak the truth. If my beloved husband has withheld some news from me, it must be something of a grave nature. Tell me about the storm you mention. I shall keep it to myself."

Tishya "Pardon me Maharani, a grave crisis has developed in respect of the Coronation. The priests and the Brahmans have decided not to conse-

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crate your person as the Empress because of your religion. They say that a Buddhist does not believe in the gods and goddesses of the Brahmanical faith and therefore cannot be anointed in the hands of the Brahman priests. The Emperor has threatened action against them. The Prime Minister is at his wit's end. He does not find a way out. He fears of a priestly revolt against His Majesty.''

Devi — ''What does the Emperor say about the Coronation in face of this Brahmanical challenge ? What action can be taken when it is a question of faith and belief ?''

Tishya — ''Maharani ! You know how much does the Emperor love you. He says, he must either have the Coronation with you by his side, or no Coronation at all.''

Devi (*stunned*) — ''No Coronation at all ! Is it ever possible ! Can there be a king without a crown ? Oh, my Lord, what a terrible situation ! How much unhappy my husband might be feeling !''

Tishya — ''God is there. The storm will pass over. The Emperor will surely have his way. Even if all the Brahmans of Bharat stand up against him, his sword is sharp enough to lift the crown to his head and to your head.''

Tishya bows down and goes out. Devi brushes aside the model crowns from her bed and remains seated in bewildered silence.

Devi — ''Oh Tathagata ! Be merciful to show me the path. Bless me not to deviate from my faith. Thousands of crowns have no meaning for me when my faith is fixed in you.''

She closes her eyes and sits for meditation.

Scene 3

Evening: Palace Ghat on River — **Devi, Radhagupta**

After her bath in the Ganga, Devi comes out of the water and climbs the steps of the river ghat. Her maids put on fresh dresses. She spots the Prime Minister at a distance on the river bank. She sends a maid to tell him that she wants to meet him. The Prime Minister comes near to Devi. The maids go away to a respectful distance.

Devi — ''Mahamantriji ! I have heard everything.''

Radhagupta (*looking distressed*) — ''I am sorry, you have already heard of the crisis. But, we are going to ride over it.''

Devi — ''How ? By threat of punishment ?''

Radhagupta — ''No. Not by force or threat of force, but by the most peaceful method that the Emperor has been able to overcome the storm of discontent. He

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has declared that there shall be no Coronation now or hereafter. He says, he will face religious fanaticism with political or personal fanaticism. If he could rule for four years without a crown, he can continue to rule without a crown as long God keeps him alive. This is the decision of your noble husband. I have agreed with him, unable to persuade the priests and the Brahmans to change their mind.''

Devi stands perplexed. She is deeply absorbed in thought.

Devi — ''How could you agree with your Emperor on a desperate decision like this ? How could you think as a Prime Minister that your Chakravarti Monarch will sit on the throne without a crown and without having been anointed as a king ? You know it well that there can be no legal, religious or political sanction behind my husband's rule if there be no Coronation ?''

Radhagupta — ''Maharani ! I understand every aspect of the problem, but am helpless. I have no power to overrule his decision. I shall only face the subjects boldly if they complain or resent. Your husband is too noble not to put a crown without his *Ardhangini* putting a crown ! Unlike King Ramachandra who abandoned Queen Sita, your husband is prepared to suffer the hostility of his subjects rather than rule without his beloved Queen near him. I admire his courage. Posterity will say that Ramachandra was a timid man while Asoka is brave.''

Devi appears stern and determined.

Devi — ''Mahamantri ! Have you cried a halt to your preparation for the grand ceremony ?''

Radhagupta — ''I am just going to do it. By tomorrow it will be announced that Chakravarti Asoka shall have no Coronation.''

Devi (*in pathos*) — ''I pray to your noble self not to do it. Please leave the matter to me. My husband must wear a crown, while his wife may not. A King is for his subjects, not for a wife ! Give me a day's time.''

She shows signs of emotional breakdown.

Devi — ''Mahamantri ! I know, there can be no Coronation without a Queen to assure succession to the throne. I pray to you to discover a suitable wife for my husband in order to fulfil the needs of the rituals. It is my desire as the Empress that the Coronation be held in its full form.''

Radhagupta pretends extreme sorrow to hear Devi's words.

Radhagupta — ''Sakya Kumari ! Can this Brahman believe his ears ? Or, am I in a state of deliration ?''

His eyes become tearful and he appears fearful.

Devi — ''Mahamantri ! You look worried. But I would request you to think of

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your greater duties to the State, and forget your love for an ordinary individual. Sakya Kumari knows what is self-sacrifice for a cause. My husband's crown is dearer to me than my life. I shall remain Asoka's wife, but not his Queen-Consort to share the throne. Let Asoka have a new wife who shall also be his Queen !''

Radhagupta looks on. Devi continues.

Devi — ''Let our talk be confined to you and me. Let not the Emperor imagine anything. Let me do my work, you please do your work to make the Coronation the biggest event of the time.''

Devi proceeds towards her maids with a happy face. Radhagupta stands alone in the gathering twilight. He speaks to himself.

Radhagupta (*looking to river Ganga*) — ''Mother Ganga ! It is only on your Blessed Land of Bharat — the Land of Sita and Savitri — that such noble women are born from time to time to sacrifice their self for the sake of their husbands. Mother, give your blessings to Devi Sakya Kumari, this unfortunate soul !''

Scene 4

Palace Garden — **Asoka, Mahindra (Aged 14), Devi**

At the fringe of the palace garden is seen a chariot, ready to take Prince Mahindra for Vihara Yatra *or the royal hunting. Trained hunters are waiting around the chariot.*

Asoka and Mahindra emerge from the palace and walk towards the chariot. Mahindra is in a soldier's dress, with spears, bows and arrows. Several steps behind them is seen Devi advancing towards them.

Asoka halts at the end of the garden. He looks upward to blue sky and finds birds flying by. He takes out a bow from Mahindra's shoulder and some arrows. Next he teaches Mahindra how to aim at a bird in the sky. He pulls his string. An arrow goes out and hits a bird.

Asoka — ''Mahindra ! It is now your turn. Aim at the flying bird and release your arrow.''

Before Mahindra pulls the string, Devi appears before them, and pulls down the bow from her son's hand.

Mahindra — ''Maa ! I am going out on *Vihara Yatra* to hunt animals. Today it will be deers, tomorrow boars, day after tomorrow tigers or lions.''

Devi (*stern voice*) — ''And, thereafter, you will go out to hunt human beings ! My dear son, how quickly have you changed yourself to a violent boy ! Are you not ashamed of yourself as my son ?''

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Mahindra stands silent with his head down. He fears to raise his eyes. Asoka intervenes.

Asoka — "Maharani ! Your son is a Kshatriya Prince. He has to learn and like hunting as a part of his heroic duty ! You should not rebuke him like this when he is working under my instructions. He will lose enthusiasm."

Asoka looks at the charioteer and soldiers.

Asoka (*turning to Mahindra*) — "My boy, they are ready. Go with them. Learn the art of hunting with keen interest."

Mahindra is about to walk forward.

Devi — "Mahi ! Stop ! You should not go a step forward on your mission of violence."

Mahindra stops. Devi turns to the charioteer and soldiers, and orders.

Devi — "Charioteer and Hunters ! Go your own way. My son will never join you on *Vihara Yatra* which is in other words a *Himsa Yatra*. Do not hereafter come to him for this mission."

The charioteer and hunters stand perplexed. Asoka waves his hand to them to go away. He next turns to Devi.

Asoka — "Tell me dear Devi, do you want your son to be a king in future or not ?"

Devi — "Yes, he shall be a king without violence. He shall be a king of peace."

Asoka — "Suppose, Mahindra is the Emperor of Magadh at this very moment, and the ruthless Kalingans invade his domain. How can he act as a king of peace ? By falling at their feet with folded hands ?"

Devi — "He shall try to win over the invaders by preaching to them the doctrines of Buddha Tathagata. He should try to win over their hearts by non-violence rather than try to win their bodies by violence !"

Asoka looks surprised. Devi shows a grim face as if to pick up a quarrel.

Asoka — "Devi ! You are at the moment the Empress of Magadh. Your son is the Heir-Apparent. Should you yourself believe in such absurd doctrines and should you misguide your son to believe in the impossible ? Prince Gautama Siddhartha left his palace, renounced the world and became the Buddha. Then and then only that He preached non-violence and peace. You cannot expect the future Emperor of Bharat to go the way of Buddha ! Maharani ! See reason and realise your mistake !"

Devi — "I would rather see my son as a Bhikshu than as a cruel man of violence like his father, grandfather and great grandfather !"

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Asoka suddenly flares up.

Asoka "Stop uttering such vulgar words ! Is it your intention to bring ruins to the dynasty of the Mauryas ? Do you intend to destroy the Empire of Chandragupta and Bindusara ? I now come to understand the reason as to why the priests and Brahmans do not want to consecrate you as my Empress at the Coronation. I thought of sending them to `Hell' to die. But, I realise it now that while they are the real well-wishers of my dynasty and of my Empire, you as my wife is the enemy of the Mauryan House ! Their suspicion of you is correct."

Devi "Suspicion of me !"

Asoka "Yes, suspicion of you as a Buddhist wife ! They say that your son can never be a strong king as a follower of his mother's principles of non-violence."

Devi "I am glad that they have understood the value of a Buddhist wife as also of a Buddhist mother ! I cannot give up my faith for sake of a mundane earthly empire. Let my faith be above my husband's ways of life. Let them also know that a Buddhist mother can never see her son on the path of violence ! I offer my congratulation to them for their correct assessment of the future. Side by side let me make it clear that my son, when Emperor, may not allow the Brahmans and priests to perform animal sacrifice anywhere in this vast domain of Magadh !"

Asoka (*agitated*) "I did not know how deep is your hatred towards others for your blind beliefs. I decided not to have my Coronation because of you. But I have to change my opinion when still there is time. My country is greater than my wife. *Rajadharma* is more correct than the *Bouddha Dharma* as far as a king is concerned."

Devi "As you are blind to follow your dharma of kingship, I too should blindly follow my dhardma of peace and piety. The two parallels can never meet."

Asoka "Devi ! Would you not change your ways of thought and action as the wife of an emperor, as the mother of a future emperor, and as the Empress of a great country ? Do not forget, you are required to behave as a wife and follow the ways of your husband ! Tell me, how can I be coronated without you near me as my wife on the throne ?"

Devi "Why not marry another wife who will willingly and blindly follow you on your kingly path ! As for Devi Sakya Kumari, she can never change !"

Asoka looks stunned, but soon trembles in anger.

Asoka "So shall it be ! Asoka shall have a wife to become his Queen-Consort ! Asoka shall have his Coronation to please his people ! For four years I wept for you to get you back, let me shed my tears for the last time in

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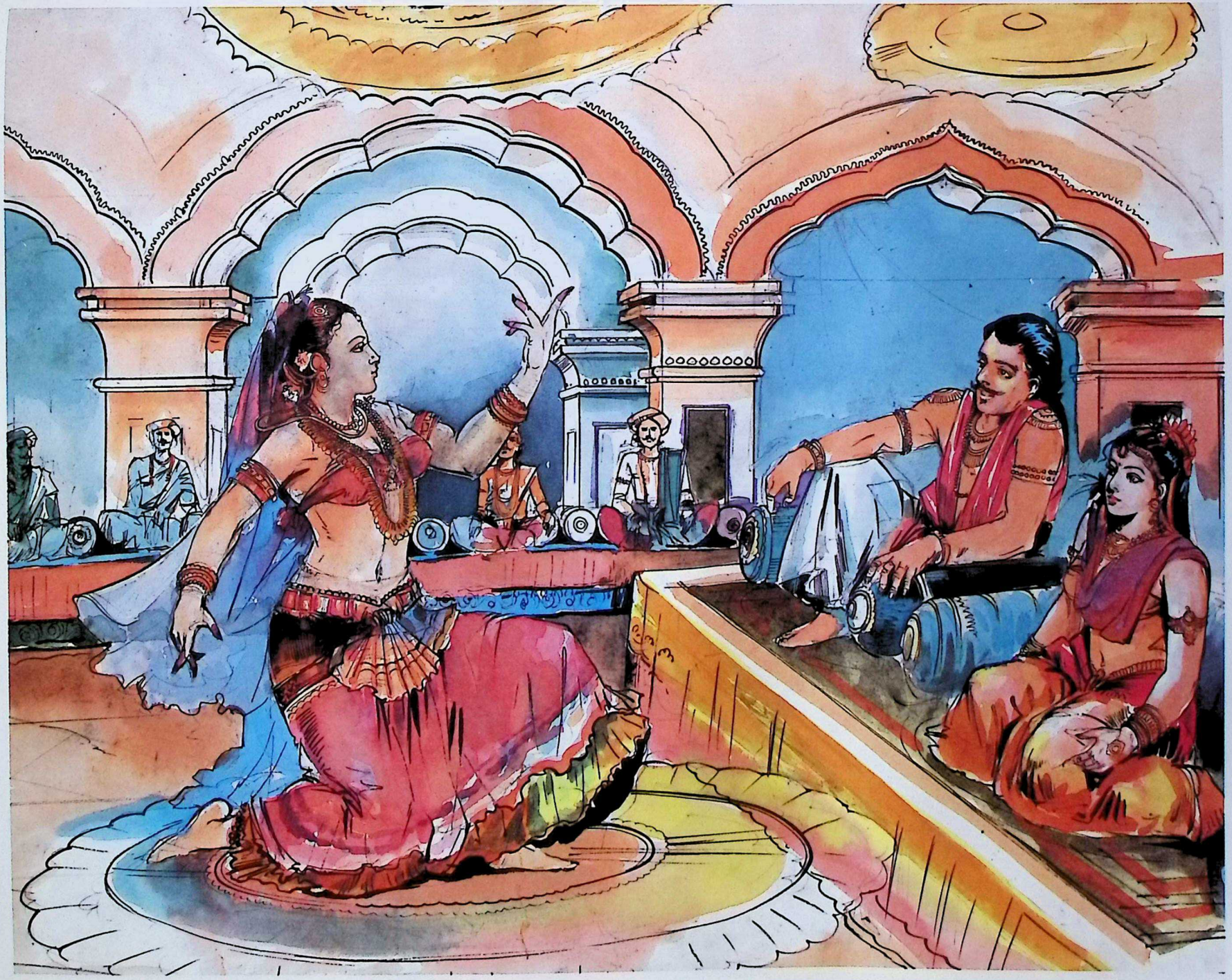

Basavadatta Presenting Dance Performance before Asoka and Asandhimitra

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pity for you dear Devi for the tragedy you have invited for yourself ! And Asoka shall shed tears of pity for his beloved Mahindra - born as a Prince and destined to be an Emperor but going to the pathetic unknown because of his mother !''

Asoka hurries away in an excited mood. Mahindra embraces his mother. Both are in tears.

Mahindra ''Maa ! I never saw my father getting so angry !''

Devi ''Take it lightly, my son. That is the way of the kings. They have to be violent in temper and violent in action.''

Mahindra ''Maa ! Today, you also exchanged angry words with my father to cause pain in his mind.''

Devi ''I am sorry if I did it. Moments come in life when tragic situations overcome one's self !''

Mahindra ''Maa ! I do not want to be a king to commit violence. Look, what my father did !''

He pointed to the dying bird which Asoka's arrow had brought down from the sky.

Scene 5

Asoka's Apartment **Asoka, Astrologer, Radhagupta**

Asoka is in a pensive mood. Radhagupta comes with an Astrologer who begins to read the Emperor's horoscope.

Astrologer ''Your Majesty ! Your previous life on this earth is revealed from the position of the stars at the time of your present birth as shown in the horoscope. In your previous life, you were a pious man and a devotee of Buddha. A virtuous lady who was also a believer in that faith felt attracted towards you for your virtuous deeds and offered prayers to the Lord to make her your wife. The Lord blessed her to be born in this life in order to be your wife. She is the daughter of a noble and a paragon of beauty. Her name is Asandhimitra, also fondly called Padmavati. It is the desire of the Almighty that Your Majesty marry this noble girl so that her prayer of the previous life is fulfilled in this life. These are the cosmic principles of birth and rebirth and of human existence on earth. You and Asandhimitra are destined to marry each other in this life.''

Asoka looks to Radhagupta.

Radhagupta ''Your Majesty ! We shall have the Coronation with beautiful Asandhimitra as your Queen-Consort. The destiny of this sacred land of Bharatavarsha is guided by the immortal souls of the Rishis and Sages. Let Heaven's

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desire be fulfilled.''

Asoka is delighted. He offers gold pieces to the Astrologer.

Scene 6

Night: Tishya's Room **Tishya**

Tishya is moving restlessly in her room and muttering words of frustration and anger. In the light of a dim lamp, her face looks grim and vengeful.

Tishya ''It is this demoniac Prime Minister who ruined my hopes. He does not know that Tishya will remain Tishya. Today it may be Asandhimitra, but some other day, it will be Tishya Rakshita. A king can have many queens. I can wait for my time. Asoka may forget Tishya's role in bringing him to the throne. Radhagupta may play the role of a traitor against Tishya. But Tishya will fulfil her dream of becoming the Empress of Bharat.''

She puts off the lamp and sinks to her bed, sobbing.

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Episode Twenty-Seven

Commentary: The Coronation of Asoka takes place amid great pomp and splendour of an unprecedented magnitude. While all the subordinate princes on India and the emissaries from foreign countries such as Simhala and the Greek kingdoms attend the ceremony, no representatives come from the neighbouring independent country of Kalinga.

Scene 1

Coronation Venue **Courtiers, Foreign Dignitaries, Ministers, Priests**

Around the Coronation platform are seated in the first row all the foreign dignitaries. Behind them are seated the Ministers, Courtiers, Generals and Brahmans row after row. Behind them are seated eminent nobles and notables. Behind them stand the citizens of Pataliputra.

Drums and trumpets play the ceremonial music. The whole venue presents a majestic sight with splendid decorations. People are in a mood of profound joy to enjoy the ceremony.

Priests begin to chant devotional prayers to invoke the blessings of Gods and Goddesses.

Scene 2

Queen's Apartment **Asandhimitra, Tishya, Maids**

Inside the Queen's apartment in the palace, Asandhimitra is being dressed by Tishya Rakshita and other maids for the ceremonial occasion. Tishya puts glittering ornaments on the Queen's body.

Tishya "Maharani ! Even the goddesses in Heaven might be feeling envious of your beauty, grace and grandeur, not to speak of ordinary women among the mortals on earth ! Wdhat a great fortune is it to become the wife of a

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Chakravarti and an Empress of Bharat !''

Asandhimitra — ''I am only happy to be the wife of my husband. I am told, it was my prayers of a previous birth which have yielded results in this birth.''

Tishya — ''There may be others who might be desiring to marry him in this life and may have to wait for the next life to see their wishes fulfilled. And, the one, who got him in this life, is being discarded by Destiny as unworthy of being his wife. How cruel is the unknowable Fate, and how delicate is human relation !''

Asandhimitra looks sad.

Asandhimitra — ''I understand what you mean. My heart goes to Vidisha Mahadevi Sakya Kumari whose place I was destined to take in spite of myself.''

She gets up to go. She is led and followed by numerous maids in splendid attire.

Scene 3

Palace Back-Door — **Devi, Mahindra (Age 14) Sanghamitra (Age 12), Dharma, Yasas, Others**

Behind the palace, at the back-door, on the bank of river Ganga, a chariot is ready to take Vidisha Devi and her children to a distant destination. Queen-Mother Dharma and Yasas are waiting for them to bid farewell. Devi and children reach the chariot.

Devi bows down at the feet of Dharma who is in tears. Mahindra and Sanghamitra come near Yasas who is emotionally upset.

Devi (*to Dharma*) — ''Mother ! At this auspicious hour of the Coronation I pray to you to feel as happy as I do. Your dear son and my beloved husband is going to put a crown on his head. It is a moment of moments in your life and my life. It is a moment of our supreme happiness.''

Dharma sobs to hear her words.

Dharma — ''Devi ! No amount of consolation will bring peace to my mind. My son's crown will not compensate your loss to me. I have been an accursed woman all my life. How far have I to swim in this sea of distress. God stored for me no happiness in this life !''

She weeps

Devi — ''Maa ! Will not my inner happiness make you feel happy? I am leaving the palace and my husband for the greatest good of my beloved's life. I am the happiest woman at this moment and shall ever remain happy till the end of my life. I pray for your blessings.''

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She touches Dharma's feet without showing any sign of distress. Dharma remain silent.

Yasas "Maharani ! You may leave the palace and all the rest of others. But for me you will ever remain the Maharani of my heart and I shall remain ever your faithful slave. I have come to join you in your journey. You cannot deny this privilege to Yasas!"

Devi "If you are dear to me, you will do me the greatest favour by staying with my dear husband. He needs you and will need you for ever more than I need. Please do not pain me by leaving my beloved husband. This is my command to you as your Maharani. Yasas, Sakya Kumari will keep you in mind wherever she may be. So will my children remember you as their saviour for ever."

Yasas stands on with folded hands and tearful eyes. A number of palace maids come weeping and touch the feet of Devi as she steps into the chariot with Mahindra and Sanghamitra. Escorts on horse follow the chariot.

From inside the palace courtyard come the loud sound of the drums and trumpets and of the wild cheers, indicating the beginning of the Coronation.

Scene 4

Coronation Avenue **Asoka, Priests, Asandhimitra**

The Coronation procession is led by a hundred priests. Asoka climbs the steps to the raised pavillion and sits on throne. Chanting of sacred hymns go on. Music play.

People (*in unison*) "Jayatu Chakravarti Samrat Asoka."

Queen Asandhimitra is next led in procession by a hundred ladies in religious attire. She takes her throne adjacent to her husband's throne.

People (*in chorus*) "Jayatu Samrajni Asandhimitra."

The Chief Priest places the crown on Asoka's head. Next, he places a crown on the head of Asandhimitra. Amid chanting of hymns by a hundred priests, the Chief Priest sprinkles holy water on the bodies of the Emperor and the Empress to consecrate their persons. People wildly cheer as the rituals are performed.

Among the foreign dignitaries, a slow whisper spreads from ear to ear.

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Greek Emissary "The Kalingans are not to be seen anywhere ! I think that country goes unrepresented."

Simhala Dignitary "The Kalingans have hurled a big insult by their absence to the Chakravarty King of Magadh. They still continue to help Asoka's enemy brothers. Who knows when a war may break out between the two hostile countries."

At the end of the sacred rituals, Asoka and Asandhimitra, with crowns on head, descend down the steps. The return procession is led by the Prime Minister and other Ministers. People acclaim by loud cheers as the procession passes by.

Scene 5

Night: Courtyard **Asoka, Asandhimitra, Foreign Dignitaries, Courtiers**

Under a gorgeously decorated canopy, the celebrated dancer of the time, Basavadatta, performs her exquisite dance to entertain the Emperor, the Empress and the foreign dignitaries and nobles.

Scene 6

Monastery at Sanchi **Devi, Mahindra, Sanghamitra, Devi's Mother, Nuns**

Vidisha Devi with her children are received by Devi's old mother and some nuns at the gate of the half-constructed monastery at Sanchi. They go inside a room.

Old Mother "Devi ! The whole life is nothing but a meaningless dream. Everything passes before my eyes in flashes - how Asoka saw you, married you, how his enemies killed your father, how your children fled to Kapilavastu, how you stayed as a captive in the enemy hideout, and how you got united with your husband and children. The dream continues - how you have left Pataliputra and come back to me. The dream will continue - how you with Mahindra and Mitra will play your new role for the cause of the Sangha. May the Tathagata lead you hereafter on your new path."

Devi "Maa ! To me, your monastery is an abode of peace. It is a much better abode than the palace of Pataliputra. Let the Blessings of Buddha be with us in this serene atmosphere of Sanchi to devote our lives to His cause."

Mahindra "When the construction of this monastery is complete, we can invite Sannyasi Upagupta to bless the place."

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Sanghamitra "I shall go with you to bring the Sannyasi to Sanchi. My heart longs to see his holy feet !"

Devi's Mother "My dear blessed ones ! The Sannyasi knows about the construction of the monastery here. When it is ready, he will himself come to consecrate the place. Your presence here will give him great pleasure. He will feel happy to see Mahindra who has renounced his claim to a kingdom like Prince Gautama Siddhartha and has turned a Bhikshu. He will be happy to see Sanghamitra who has renounced her life as a princess to lead the life of a Bhikshuni in the service of the Sangha ! Both of you are like precious gifts of Buddha to this sorrowful humanity."

The songs of the monks and nuns in melodious voice are heard from an adjacent hall.

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Episode Twenty-Eight

Commentary: After his Coronation, Asoka turns into an aggressive imperialist. As the years pass, hostility between Magadh and Kalinga comes to a culminating point when war appears inevitable. While Asoka moves on his war-path, Devi, Mahindra and Sanghamitra enter upon their missionary career for the cause of peace.

Scene 1

Sanchi Monastery **Devi, Mahindra, Sanghamitra**

It took six years for Devi to complete the construction of the great monastery at Sanchi. Mahindra is now a handsome youth of 20, and Sanghamitra, a beautiful young lady of 18. They are seen in front of the monastery which looks impressive.

Mahindra "Maa ! We may now open this monastery to all the monks and nuns who come from all parts of the country to visit this holy place. After this, we can think of erecting a huge stupa."

Devi "Mahindra ! You will be happy to know that Sannyasi Upagupta has sent his gracious consent to come and inaugurate the monastery."

Mahindra "His visit will be a momentous occasion. Will you not permit me to be ordained as a Bhikshu by the Sannyasi himself. I am now twenty in age. Since I am my father's eldest son, he may summon me to the capital to become the Crown Prince. At least this is what the monks fear. Better that I turn a Bhikshu at this opportune moment and renounce the world for good."

Sanghamitra "Mother ! I am now eighteen in age. If my brother is admitted to the Order as a Bhikshu, I may also be ordained as a Bhikshuni and admitted to the Order."

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Devi "Everything depends on the Will of the Lord. If the Buddha has saved my son from the path of the killers in order to serve the humanity as a healer, and has made my daughter a *mitra* or friend of the Sangha, He will also show you your future."

They go round the monastery.

Scene 2

Asoka's Audience Chamber **Asoka, Radhagupta, Yasas, Generals**

Asoka is in discussion with the Prime Minister and Generals on Magadh-Kalinga relations. Yasas is present.

Asoka "My patience is getting exhausted in respect of Kalinga. Should this country be allowed to remain out of the Chakravarti-Kshetra of the dream of Chanakya and Chandragupta ? Should I keep my eyes closed like my father and grandfather towards this country ? Should I tolerate the existence of an independent country adjacent to my frontiers ? Should I see the mischief of my enemy brother Sugatra with the active support of the Kalinga Rulers ? The Kalingans do not allow my traders to reach the seas. They do not allow our merchants to pass through their land towards the southern countries in Dakshinapatha. They seem to be relentlessly determined to regard all kings of Magadh as their enemies. There is a limit to my tolerance and patience ! Something should be done, and done without delay".

Radhagupta "Your Majesty ! Kalinga was a threat to Magadh in the days of the first two Mauryas. Their stand is the same today as before. The Kalingans are proud of their oversea colonies in Burma, Suvarnadwipa, Bali, Borneo, Sumatra and Java. They are proud of their wealth and maritime commerce. They are proud of themselves as a race of warriors. They are proud of their military strength and the elephant force."

Asoka (*agitated*) "I must destroy their pride. Is my strength inferior to their strength ? I have the resources of the whole of Bharatavarsha and the army of fighters from all parts of my vast domain. I am a Chakravarti Monarch while the Kalingans have no king to fight with me. Should I therefore suffer in silence the insolence of this neighbouring country ?"

Asoka looks to his Generals.

Commander-in-Chief "Our army is in full form to invade any outside country, be it Persia or Kalinga."

Radhagupta "Yes, we have an army, larger than as ever before. Yet, we need some further preparation, both military and diplomatic, before we invade. We may try to create a rift among the Kalinga Chiefs to break their unified command as did King Ajatasatru in good old days before invading the

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republican states of ancient Bharat. It is an opportunity to us that the Kalingans have no king at the moment. And, following the Kautilyan methods we can easily create discord and dissension among the rulers of Kalinga.''

Asoka — ''I agree. We may also take the enemy by surprise by pretending friendship while preparing for invasion.''

Yasas — ''May I be permitted to visit Kalinga as a pilgrim to the place of Buddha's Tooth Relic and to other centres of pilgrimage in order to make a first-hand study of that country's strength and weakness ! As I have heard, the Kalingans allow the pilgrims to come to their holy places from all parts of Bharat. Being a stronghold of Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina faiths, Kalinga is like an open country for all.''

Radhagupta — ''Your Majesty ! It is a good suggestion. Yasas may also see the capital of Kalinga and its harbours on the seashores. He may bring back valuable information to help our preparation.''

Asoka — ''Prepare your plans as you think best. As for me, I cannot rest in peace unless I humble the proud Kalingans. Sooner the better.''

Scene 3

Toshali: Kalinga Court — **Kalinga Leaders, Priests, Scholars, Courtiers**

Inside their spacious Court Hall in Toshali Fort, the Kalinga Ruling Chiefs are waiting to receive a team of wise men who had been engaged to trace out the scions of the ancient Chedi Dynasty of Kalinga.

The wise men come in and take their seats facing the Ruling Chiefs.

1st Chief — ''I welcome the learned scholars to the court and request them to present their findings about the ancient Chedi Dynasty''.

Chief Scholar — ''Your Highnesses ! On behalf of the team of scholars, I am happy to say that at long last we have achieved success in tracing out the surviving scion of the ancient-most royal dynasty of the great land of Kalinga.

Courtiers cheer.

''In ages past, in the days of Gautama Buddha, there was a Mahajanapada between the rivers Jamuna and Narmada where lived a Lunar Kshatriya race named Cheta. A great hero of this race named Abhichandra established the Kingdom of Chedirashtra extending from the Vindhian forests to the rivers of Mahanadi and Suktimati in this Kalinga land. His son and successor King Vasu earned the title of Rajarshi for his many pious deeds. In the tides of Time, after several kings of this dynasty had

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ruled over Kalinga, their rule came to an end, and the scions of the Chedis disappeared into oblivion. Thanks to Heaven, we have been able to trace out a boy of seven who is the last in the line of that dynasty and who lives on the bank of a tributary of the river Mahanadi. His name is Aira whose body contains many auspicious signs. At present Prince Aira is in the custody of an eminent chief of fisherman who venerate him as a divine boy.

Loud cheers from Courtiers

"We pray that this boy of the surviving Chetavamsa be offered the throne of Kalinga."

Cheers

Chief Priest — "Revered Rulers ! The Chetavamsa, as we know, was profusely mentioned in our ancient Brahmanic Shastras. We also know that the Kings of that dynasty found recognition in the texts of the Buddhists and the Jainas."

Courtiers cheer. The Ruling Chiefs discuss among themselves for a while.

Kalinga Chief — "We the Ruling Chiefs of Kalinga congratulate our wise scholars for their long but fruitful endeavour in finding out the scion of the Cheta Dynasty. The Priests are requested to decide upon an auspicious day when Prince Aira can be brought to Toshali in a ceremonial procession. And, as long as Aira remains a minor, we shall continue to rule to the best of our ability."

Wild cheers from the Courtiers.

Scene 4

City of Dantapura on Sea — **Yasas, Monks, Merchants, Crowds**

Dantapura is a populous city on the Kalinga seashore. At the centre of the city stands a huge stupa containing the Holy Tooth Relic of Buddha. Around the stupa are crowds of Buddhist monks and pilgrims. Adjacent to the place are centres of trade and commerce, crowded with merchants. Yasas, in disguise as a Buddhist pilgrim, is seen sitting at a place and talking to some Kalingan Buddhists.

1st Kalingan — "You seem to be a stranger to the place ! Where do you come from ?"

Yasas — "Friends ! I come from the holy place of Bodh-Gaya where Buddha got His Enlightenment."

2nd Kalingan — "That is indeed a place of places. But we cannot go there in fear of the wicked king of Magadh, Chandasoka, who persecutes the Buddhists."

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3rd Kalingan "Every Buddhist centre of Magadh is like a haunted place because of this dangerous king who does not know how to respect other religions. What to speak of his hostility towards ordinary pilgrims and monks, this wretched king even drove out his own wife and children from his palace because they believed in Buddha Tathagata. Such a monsterking can only go to Hell after his death."

1st Kalingan "Don' you know that king Asoka has himself erected a 'Hell' in his capital to torture innocent men and women !"

The Kalingans laugh aloud.

Yasas "Pious friends ! You are perhaps wrongly informed about our king. He did not drive out his wife and children. They went out of their own will to serve the Buddhist Sangha. Had the king been wicked he could have killed them for leaving the palace !"

1st Kalingan "Do not praise your king. Hundreds of Magadhan Buddhist monks have escaped from that country and have taken shelter in our land. In this country, all religions are respected equally. You can see yourself in your own eyes tomorrow how Brahamans, Buddhists and Jainas will together pull the chariot containing the Holy Tooth of Buddha - all praying, singing and dancing together around the chariot while taking it in procession."

Scene 5

Thousands of people are celebrating the Car Festival of Buddha's Tooth Relic in the streets of Dantapuri. The Car is being pulled by Brahmans, Buddhists and Jainas in deep devotion. Yasas with his five companions observe the scene in surprise. They also find the Kalinga Rulers joining the crowds of people in pulling the Car.

Scene 6

Highway to Toshali **Procession of People**

In a huge procession the people and priests of Kalinga are taking their boy Prince Aira in a decorated chariot towards the Fort of Toshali. Hundreds of elephants run behind the chariot. On either side of the street are standing thousands of men and women to see the Prince and shower flower on his chariot. They raise their slogan in unison "Swagatam Aira, Swagatam Aira." Aira presents a brave, herioc and noble face. Near the boy is seated Karuvaki, the young beautiful daughter of the chief fisherman. Yasas observes the scene and expresses surprise to see the enthusiasm of the people.

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Scene 7

Hilltop Cave **Yasas, Jaina Monks**

Yasas is seen inside a cave-shelter on the top of the Kumara-Kumari Hill's talking with some Jaina Monks.

Monk "This is the place where Mahavira Jina preached his religion to the people of Kalinga. Since that time, this place on the Kumara-Kumari Hills has become one of the sacred-most sites of piligrimage for the Jainas of whole Bharat. They come from every corner of the country extending from the Himalayas to Kanya Kumari."

Yasas "Holy Savant ! Are many people of Kalinga Jainas ? I saw the Kalingan Buddhists in Dantapuri. I find the Kalingan Jainas here at Kumara-Kumari Hills. What then is the main faith of this land ?"

Monk "Friend ! See, I am a Jaina monk. Many of the Kalingan people believe in Jainism. Many others believe in the religion of Buddha. But, as everywhere in Bharat, so too in Kalinga country, most people believe in Brahmanism. As the Heaven so wills, all people of this land respect all religions and worship all the holy relics."

Yasas "What about your Rulers ? Do they quarrel among themselves for belonging to different religions ?"

Monk "There are believers of different faiths among them, though majority of them worship Brahmanic Gods. But they never quarrel.

They may differ on issues of trade or commerce or laws and rules, but not on a matters of faiths. And, whatever may be their differences, when it is a question of the power or prestige of Kalinga, they stand up as one and indivisible ! As for example, all the rulers and people of Kalinga are one and united in their hostility towards Magadh. The issue of dispute between the two countries relates to the faith of the Jainas. But, yet, all are with the Jainas since the issue affects the prestige of Kalinga."

Yasas shows curiosity to hear more from the monk.

Yasas "My venerable *Arhata* ! Would you kindly enlighten me on this issue ? As a stranger I feel more and more interested to hear about your great people !"

Monk "The story is long. But let me tell you briefly about it. Long long before Mahavira Jina was born, one of the earliest Tirthankaras named Rishavanath was born on the soil of Kalinga. Mahavira was the last of the Tirthankaras, but it was the earlier Tirthankaras who laid the foundation of the Jaina Faith. The people of Kalinga regarded Rishavanath as a Divine Being and worshipped Him as such. After his death, the sculptors of this land erected an enormous statue of Rishavanath in precious stone

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and worshipped it. Nay, all the people of all the faiths worshipped it as Divine. But, one day came an invader from Magadh whose name was Nanda Raja. He plundered and looted the jewels of the temple and also carried away the great Image along with the Holy *Asana* of the Tirthankara, studded with emeralds. Nanda Raja carried it to Magadh. Consequent upon this heinous act of sacrilege, the entire people of Kalinga took a vow to avenge this wanton act. Four generations have passed by, yet the Kalingan people have not forgotten of the act of Nanda Raja. Some day, they say, they will fight with Magadh and bring back the Image of the Kalinga Jina and His precious *Asana*."

Yasas "Interesting indeed ! But can the Kalinga country fight with Magadh to regain the Image ?"

Monk "Who knows, one day they may invade Pataliputra to recover the sacred object."

Yasas "Is not Magadh a more powerful country"

Monk "Power depends on determination. It is the religious determination of a united population that may give the Kalingans the real power to defeat Magadh. And, who knows what will hppen when the boy Aira, who is a Jaina by birth, comes to the throne of Kalinga? As a Jaina Monarch he cannot rest in peace unless and until he recovers the Holy Image ! His subjects will force him to fight. We the non-violent monks pray and wish that some day the rulers of Magadh realise the past mistake of Nanda Raj and be wise enough to return to Kalinga the holy object of an entire people ! That single gesture of goodness may make the Kalingans friends of the Magadhans for ever ! It is only our day-dream."

Yasas "Holy Arhata ! I offer my homage to you for your good words. May I now take leave of you with your blessings !"

The Monk puts his hand on Yasas' head as he bows down to touch him feet.

Scene 8

Port Charitra Nagar **Prince Sugatra, Kalingan Captains and Soldiers.**

In the Kalinga Port of Charitra Nagar, hundreds of ships are seen going out to high seas and coming in from distant oversea lands. On a cliff near the seashore is seen Prince Sugatra with some army captains and soldiers of Kalinga. He points his finger towards the distant horizon to draw the attention of the Kalingans to that direction.

Sugatra "Look at those three incoming ships on the horizon having blue sails. They are Magadhan ships carrying Magadhan merchants back from Indonesia. I have received reports from my agents in Pataliputra that the King of Indonesia is sending diamonds and jewels to Asoka as presents through these merchants who must be in disguise. I am sure, the ships

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will touch the shore in the dead of the night. Let us fall upon them as and when they take their shelter.''

Captain — Kumara ! My soldiers will keep watch on the ships as they come in to touch the port.''

They come down the cliff and take position.

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Scene 9

Night: Inside Thatched Shelter — **Magadhan Merchants, Kalingan Captain, His Soldiers**

Twenty Magadhan merchants in disguise as monks are resting inside a thatched shelter on the seashore. It is midnight. Some are lying on the floor with their chests under their heads as pillows. Some are eating meals near a flickering lamp. About thirty Kalinga soldiers with naked swords suddenly and silently enter into the shelter, led by a captain.

Captain — ''Strangers ! Are you monks or merchants ? Open up your chests and hand over your jewels forthwith !''

The fearful Magadhans stand up. Their leader kneels down with folded hands.

Magadhan — ''Oh Lord, our merciful master ! We are no merchants. We are poor monks from Kasi. We have done no wrong. Have your mercy on us.''

Captain — ''Is Kasi situated inside the sea ? We saw you coming out from foreign ships ! We saw you reaching the shore at dead of night and crawling to this shelter in darkness ! And you say, you are monks from Kasi !''

पुस्तकालय गुरुकुल कांगड़ी विश्वविद्यालय

The soliders pull down their beards and false hair and robes. They tremble.

Captain — ''Get ready for execution. You have come in disguise to play some dangerous game. You have abused our Law that permits outside ships to carry only their goods, not enemies in disguise. And, you are no foreign merchants either ! You are Magadhans ! Tell me, what for has that monster king of your vile country sent you to Kalinga ? With that evil intention has Chandasoka sent you here ?''

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Soliders start whipping the Magadhans. They search their belongings. As they open up the chests, they find a large number of diamonds and gems.

Scene 10

Day: Outside Shelter — **Kalinga Soliders, Magadhans, Crowds**

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The Magadhans are paraded before an excited crowd. Their heads are shaven and painted with pictures of Naga snakes in black colour. Their empty chests are filled up with cobras and closed under seals. The crowd hurl abusing words against the Magadhans and more so at their King.

Captain "You, the stupid agents of a foolish king ! Go, and tell your Master that the gifts which you brought for him from a foreign king have been replaced by us with new gifts which he rightly deserves. Tell him further not to indulge in illegal trade with other countries like a robber. He must know to behave as a king".

The crowds jeer at the Magadhans as they stand with their heads down. Soliders place on their bare heads the chests containing the snakes. Their backs are also painted with pictures of Nagas in white colour.

Captain "Go back to your country to open up your bodies before your king and his courtiers."

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Kalinga Rulers Holding Court Pandit Announces the Discovery of Boy Aira

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Boy Prince Aira being taken to Toshali with Karuvaki

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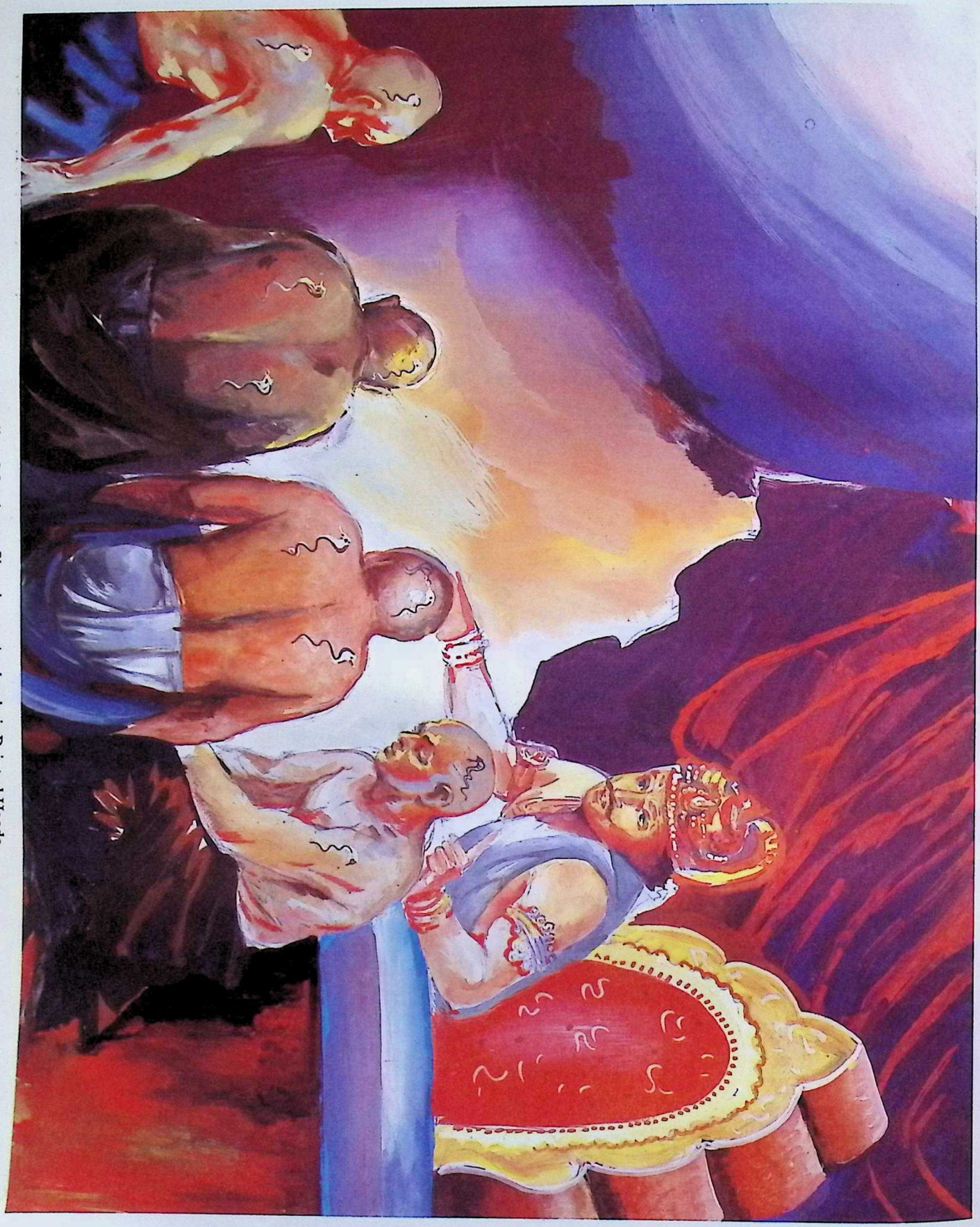

Magadhan Merchants Showing to Asoka their Painted Heads

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Episode Twenty-Nine

Commentary: In the 12th year of his reign and 8th year of his coronation, Asoka decides upon an invasion of Kalinga. Stratagems are worked out to deceive the Kalingans by an offer of friendship while preparations are made for a surprise invasion.

Scene 1

Palace Courtyard **Asoka, Courtiers, Merchants**

In the open courtyard of the Mauryan Palace, Emperor Asoka is sitting on a throne and waiting to welcome the Magadhan merchants on their return from Indonesia with jewels. On either side of his throne are seated some notable courtiers.

Soon appear before him the twenty merchants with their faces and bodies covered under black shrouds. Their servants are seen with them carrying heavy chests on their head. The merchants come in front of the Emperor and kneel down before him. Immediately thereafter they abruptly uncover their heads and bodies. Asoka and the courtiers are taken aback to see their condition.

Merchants (*in one voice*) "Chakravarti Emperor ! This is the fate we have suffered at the hands of the Kalinga Nagas ! They have plundered our jewels and disgraced us in the most indescribable manner."

Radhagupta (*excited*) "Do you come to enact this drama before His Majesty ! Go out forthwith."

Asoka's eyes are fixed on the heads of the merchants.

Asoka (*calm voice*) "What are these marks on your heads and backs ?"

Chief Merchant "These are the pictures of *naga* snakes, painted by the Kalingans to be shown to you and the courtiers."

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The courtiers stand up to see.

2nd Merchant — "We have taken courage to come like this to the presence of our Emperor because of our determination to die. We appeal to Your Majesty to remove our painted heads from our painted bodies under the axe of your executioners."

Radhagupta — "What do these chests contain ?"

Chief Merchant — "Gifts of the Kalinga-Nagas for the Emperor of Magadh, so they said."

A soldier receives indication from Radhagupta to open a chest. As the lock is broken and the cover lifted, live cobras and nagas *raise their poisonous hoods with hissing sounds.*

Asoka — "Anything more do you want to say or show."

Merchants (*together*) — "We pray for execution. Nothing else !"

Radhagupta — "How could they detect you and your ships ? How could they know of the jewels ?"

Chief Merchant — "It is Prince Sugatra who guided the operation from a distance. We have no doubt, he has his agents in Pataliputra to have passed to him the information about our journey to bring the Indonesian jewels through the Kalinga harbour of Charitra Nagar."

Asoka — "My brave countrymen ! Insult to you is an insult to your Emperor. Go back to your homes in peace of mind and wait for the time when the enemy tastes the venom of my army as my return gift to that entire race of the Kalingans. Let Sugatra save them from Asoka's hand."

With a grim face Asoka departs from the scene. The courtiers gather around the merchants to hear more of their plight.

Scene 2

Palace Terrace — **Asoka, Tishya**

On the terrace of the palace, Asoka is walking to and fro in reckless pace. Tishya comes with a vessel of wine.

Asoka — "Tishya ! Have I not sat on the throne of Magadh for twelve years by now ? Have I not put crown on my head for eight years ? Tell me, what have I done in these long years except killing my brothers and my subjects ? Have I added a single piece of new land to the Empire of Chandragupta and Bindusara ? Have I faced the powers which threaten our existence ? If not, am I worthy of the Mauryas and of Magadh !"

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Tishya "Aryaputra ! Patience is the path to success. The years you refer to have not gone in vain. Your army by now has assumed an enormous shape. So too have increased your resources and wealth. An earlier invasion of Kalinga, which your father and grandfather prudently avoided, could have proved risky. But an invasion at this time when your strength is invincible will crown you with victory."

She pours wine to a cup and passes it to Asoka's hand.

Asoka If you think that the time is ripe, let me march to victory without any delay. If I wait, I shall waste myself."

He drinks from the cup.

Tishya "Yasas has returned from Kalinga. A man of penetrating intelligence, he must have ascertained the weaknesses of that country and thought of novel strategies to outwit the enemy."

Scene 3

Asoka's Private Chamber **Asoka, Yasas, Radhagupta**

Yasas reports to Asoka and Radhagupta about his findings in Kalinga.

Asoka "Tell me Yasas, if the might of the Kalingans is superior to the strength of Magadh so that they would continue to insult us in the way they are doing ?"

Yasas "Emperor ! The might of a country depends on the morale of its rulers and the fraternity of its people. The Kalinga country is fortunate to possess both. Within the next few years, they will feel more powerful with a new king on the throne."

Asoka "I am aware of their past and present. I know of their strength. Tell me about their weaknesses on which we can prepare our strategies."

Yasas "While the greatest strength of the Kalingans from economic point is the wealth from their colonies, their greatest weakness from military consideration is that a larger part or their army is engaged in keeping the far-flung colonies under control. In this sense, our army will vastly outnumber their army. Added to this, the Kalingans also send away parts of their army annually to demonstrate their military power in the colonies. In other words, there comes a time in a year when the Kalinga country is virtually empty of soldiers."

Radhagupta "In which part of the year do they send their regular forces outside ?"

Yasas "At the end of the monsoons when the seas become calm, that is, in the autumn."

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Asoka "Excellent indeed !"

Yasas "Your Majesty ! These are informations about their weakness. But added to all these, I am armed with a concrete proposal to disarm the Kalingans completely before our sudden invasion."

Asoka "Yasas, you are a master strategist. Do reveal your plan."

Yasas "For full four generations by now, the Kalingans are the deadly enemies of Magadh for a religiously sentimental reason. Unwisely enough King Mahapadma Nanda carried away from Kalinga their most sacred object of worship — the Holy Image of the Adi Tirthankara Rishavanath. If we pretend friendship and agree to return the Image, they will be off the guard when we invade."

Radhagupta "If we surrender that great Image, it will be like the surrender of our prestige ! Our action will suggest that a weaker Magadh is begging for peace from a stronger Kalinga."

Yasas "Mahamantriji ! I have thought over this. My suggestion is that we move aggressively to demand from the Kalingan Rulers to surrender Prince Sugatra. In course of this demand, we may raise a proposal for a permanent peace between the two neighbouring countries. I am sure, they will demand to give them back the Kalinga Jina, and we may promise them to give it back in return for Kalinga's good conduct."

Asoka "Do you mean that if they agree, we shall return to Toshali the Image of the Jina ? No, this I shall never do."

Yasas "We are playing a game of deception, not a real deal. We shall take to Toshali a fake Image. By the time they realise their folly, our army will be falling upon them. And, once they get the Image, their army will embark upon over-sea voyages to conquer new lands in Suvarnadwipa."

Asoka (*delighted*) "Yasas, nothing succeeds like success. Let us see how you succeed. You may go ahead with your plan."

Scene 4

Toshali Court **Kalinga Rulers, Courtiers, Magadhan Emissaries, Sugatra**

The Kalinga Rulers have summoned the Court to announce a decision of boy Aira, as well as to receive the Mahadhan Emissaries to hear Asoka's message.

1st Chief "I have to announce to the Court about the decision of the noble Aryaputra Aira. It is his desire that he shall not regard himself as a prince till his education and training go on till the fifteenth year of his life. It is also his desire that he shall continue to stay with his noble guardians as before, and in charge of that noble lady, Karuvaki, instead of staying in

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the Fort of Toshali. We have decided in our Council to respect the wishes of our future prince.''

Courtiers (*in unison*) ''May the Gods bless the noble Aira.''

1st Chief ''The King of Magadh has sent a Peace-Mission to the Court of Kalinga. Let the Magadhans present their case.''

The Courtiers express considerable surprise and concern in their face. The Magadhans are ushered in.

1st Chief ''The Court welcomes you as the emissaries of King Asoka. You may present the message of your King.''

Chief Emissary ''We pay our homage to the Gracious Rulers of this glorious country. Our Chakravarti Emperor, His Imperial Majesty Aryaputra Asoka, with the best of his intentions, has wished the noble people of Kalinga their prosperity. With this, he has expressed his honest hope that Magadh and Kalinga, being the two neighbouring sister countries, may develop cordial relation by mutual trust and friendly relations.''

2nd Chief ''We reciprocate the feeling of King Asoka and are ready to cooperate. You may present on behalf of your King if there are specific means to develop this friendship.''

Chief Emissary ''Our Emperor feels unhappy that his renegade brother Prince Sugatra and his followers have found asylum in Kalinga and are busy fomenting misunderstanding betweeen the two countries. Our Emperor requests that his enemies be handed over to us as a preliminary step towards a lasting friendship.''

3rd Chief ''Dear Emissaries ! This is a small issue on which your King is exercised rather unnecessarily. We can render Prince Sugatra and his men harmless without surrendering them. On the other hand, if King Asoka agrees to hand over to Kalinga just a piece of black stone, he can get back in return not only lasting peace but also many facilities to the advantage of Magadh. Kalinga is ready to allow the Magadhan merchants to use her seaports for oversea trade. Kalinga is ready to grant passage to the people of your country to go to the far south. Kalinga can open her markets for various commodities from Magadh. There are many more facilities which our country can provide to your country if a friendly relation is established. Will your King give us back only a piece of stone to us to gain so many advantages ?''

Chief Emissary ''Revered Lords! is there any such stone in Magadh which is so dear to the heart of the Kalinga people? If there be any, on behalf of our Emperor we can promise that it shall be returned so that Magadh gains the friendship of Kalinga.''

Ist Chief ''Dear Friends! The stone we refer to is the Stone Image of the Kalinga Jina which an earlier king of your country took away from our country.''

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Chief Emissary "Your Majesties! Do you mean the Statue of the Adi Tirthankara Rishavanath?"

Ist Chief "Yes, we mean that."

Chief Emissary "Revered Rulers! Straight away on behalf of our Emperor we may say that our people are no believers in Jina or Buddha. Any Image of Jina, therefore, is of no value to our country. But, if the people of Kalinga want it back for their satisfaction, our Gracious Emperor will gladly give it back. In our honest desire for the friendship of Kalinga, I, as the head of this Peace Mission, may assure the august Rulers and noble courtiers of Kalinga Rashtra that Emperor Asoka will be happy to send this Prime Minister to hand over the Image of Jina to the people here in Toshali."

The Courtiers cheer in joy as the Magadhans are escorted out of the Court with honour. The Kalinga rulers embrace each other in joy. But Prince Sugatra struggles to reach the Rulers and stands in their front.

Sugatra "For Heaven's sake, do not believe in Asoka's Peace-Mission. It may just be a trap to deceive you. Only God knows what Asoka designs to destory his enemies!"

First Chief "I do not believe Asoka is so depraved to disgrace royalty!

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Episode Thirty

Commentary: A comprehensive stratagem is worked out to convince the Rulers of Kalinga about the peace intention of Magadh. Side by side, massive preparations are made for invasion and war.

Scene 1

Underground Vault **Asoka, Yasas, Radhagupta**

Radhagupta takes Asoka and Yasas to an underground vault in the Mauryan palace wherein is kept the original Image of the Kalinga Jina. The Cover is removed from the huge statue as Asoka observes it. An impressive Idol of glittering black marble, studded with emeralds, stands exposed.

Asoka — "What a majestic and adorable Image of an ancient Tirthankara! It is not for nothing that the people of Kalinga feel so strong about it, especially when they believe it to be divine! But, we can never give it back. It is a question of prestige."

Yasas — "An exact imitation of this Image will be worked out by our master sculptors as quickly as possible."

Radhagupta — "We have planned for a ceremonial procession in which the fake Image will be carried to Toshali."

Asoka — "The army of invasion be kept ready simultaneously. Otherwise, once the Kalingans know of the trick, they may retaliate with vengeance."

Yasas — "Aryaputra! I seek your consent to go to Kalinga with an advance party of spies and saboteurs to pave ground for the invasion."

Asoka — Yes, your adventure may achieve wonders! I shall meet you on the ruins of Toshali."

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Asoka laughs while looking at the image.

Scene 2

Highway

A huge decorated chariot, carrying the covered heavy fake image of Kalinga Jina, surrounded by Magadhan Jaina monks, is heading towards Toshali. In another chariot is seen a man exactly resembling Prime Minister Radhagupta, surrounded by his escorts.

On either side of the highway, Kalingan men and women and children in thousands cheer the Magadhan Peace Mission. They shower flowers at the chariot carrying the Image.

Scene 3

Gate of Toshali Fort **Kalinga Rulers, Magadhan Monks, Crowds**

Outside the stupendous gate of the Toshali Fort are standing the Rulers of Kalinga with Courtiers, Jaina Priests and people in solemn silence to receive the image and welcome the Magdhan Prime Minister and his party.

The procession comes to a halt. Flowers are showered on the thickly covered statue as a number of Jaina monks carry down the statue from the chariot to the gate. The Magadhan Jainas chant sacred hymns. The Kalingan Jainas perform the arati with burning lamps. The Chief of the Magdhan Jaina monks stands on the chariot and waves his hands at the assembled leaders and people.

Mogadhan Monk "Venerable Kalinga Chiefs, Priests and people! This Holy Image of the Adi Tirthankara will be placed inside the Toshali Fort and kept under cover till an auspicious date is fixed for the beginning of its regular worship. In our opinion, the image may better be installed at the original site on the Kumara-Kumari Hills from where the Nanda Raja took it away. The worship of the image by the Jaina monks of Kalinga will begin only after the image is installed and uncovered on a sacred pedestal. For the time, only the venerable Kalinga Arhatas can see the Image inside the Fort."

People cheer and sing hymns as the statue is carried inside.

Scene 4

Fort:Interior

The image of Jina is taken with devotional music and placed inside a Splendidly decorated spacious hall inside the Fort. Jaina Arhatas of Kalinga take charge of the image from the Jaina

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monks of Magadh amidst chanting of Jaina hymns. There chief Arhatas of Kalinga see the statue by lifting the cover partly and go into ecstasy in deep devotion.

Scene 5

Toshali Fort: Audience Hall **Kalinga Chiefs, Counterfeit Radhagupta, Magadhan Escorts**

Inside the audience hall of the Fort, the Kalingan Chiefs receive the Magadhan Prime Minister and his companions for exchange of courtesies.

Ist Chief "Honoured Prime Minister! Your noble Emperor has done one of the noblest of acts by giving back to Kalinga the cherished/dol of this land. We express our profound gratitude to him. Our animosity towards a sister country, running for generations and decades, is now washed away by this sacred work of King Asoka. From now on, Magadh and Kalinga are cordial friends. We assure you that Kalinga will provide all needful facilities in trade, commerce and travel to the fraternal people of your country from now on. We pray for the long life of your great Chakravarti."

Radhagupta "Venerable Ruling Chiefs! I have obeyed the command of my Emperor in personally accompanying the religious procession from Pataliputra to Toshali, I am deeply pleased to see your beautiful country. Now that my duty is over, may I take leave of Toshali as early as my escorts are ready for the return journey! My Emperor might be eagerly waiting to hear about your gracious assurances for peace and friendship!"

2nd Chief "Dear Mahamantri ! May we request you to spend a few days in our capital and also to accompany us to the Lake Chilika to observe one of our annual festivals!"

Radhagupta "As a Brahman, I shall be delighted to see the festival if it is a religious one!"

2nd Chief "No, it is not religious, but is sacred. It is our yearly ceremony performed all over Kalinga on river banks and seashores to worship the ships and bid farewell to sailors for their outward voyage. For ages past, the kings and rulers of Kalinga have performed this festival on Chilika from where hundreds of ships sail for oversea colonies. We suggest that the Prime Minister of friendly Magadh may see this grand festival."

Fake Radhagupta smiles to indicate his consent.

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Scene 6

Lake Chilika **Kalinga Chiefs, Radhagupta**

Before a massive congregation of people, the Kalingan women in chaste white dress worship the ships ready for departure. The sailors and merchants are also showered with flowers and garlanded. The whole place presents a festive appearance with decorated arches and silken flags.

The Kalinga Chiefs take their seats on a raised platform. Radhagupta and his companions sit near them. A hundred gorgeously dressed girls perform the Boita Bandana *or Ship-Worshipping Dance with lamps in hands. Crowds cheer and clap as the dance goes on.*

At a distance in the lake are seen thousands of soldiers boarding the waiting ships for oversea journey to distant colonies. Radhagupta and his men observe the movement of the soldiers with keen interest.

Scene 7

Guards' Shelter: Interior **Sugatra, Kalinga Officers**

Inside a small shelter for guards near the lake, Prince Sugatra is seen confined like a captive and talking to some Kalinga officers. He appears desperate and restless.

Sugatra "I say, this man is not Radhagupta. If you allow me to reach the dais, I shall expose the pretender in a moment. I wonder, why should the wise Rulers of Kalinga allow themselves to fall victims to mischievous machinations monstrous Asoka ! Please release me from confinement for sake of your country !"

Officer "We have been ordered to keep you here till the festival is over and till the guests depart. We have been further ordered not to allow you or any of your followers to come anywhere near to the Magadhan dignitaries. You can understand that they will withdraw their peace proposals the moment they see you".

Sugatra "Please go and whisper to the ears of your masters that this Radhagupta is not the real Radhagupta. Appeal to them on my behalf to allow me to expose the pretender. If I fail to do it, they may pronounce death penalty on me, or, may hand me over to the Magadhans."

Officer "We are helpless. We cannot approach our Rulers. We are too small to carry any message to the highest place."

Sugatra mutters to himself his words of disgust and frustration.

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Sugatra "Danger is ahead for these simple-minded men who do not understand the mind of their sworn enemies. Radhagupta lured my brother to death by risking his own life. He has sent his duplicate to Kalinga with a sinister motive. The Kalinga Cheifs are digging their own grave. What can man do when Fate is hostile !"

He sits down in distress and refuses to receive food from the officers. His face expresses grave concern.

Scene 8

Highway

On the highway is running a chariot carrying Radhagupta and his men, followed by armed guards of Kalinga on hoseback. The Magadhan Peace Mission is heading towards their frontiers.

Scene 9

Toshali Fort **Jaina Monks, Kalinga Chiefs, Aira, Karuvaki, Sugatra**

On an appointed day, hundreds of Kalingan Jainas assemble with their celebrated Arhatas to remove the Image of Jina from the Fort of Toshali to the summit of the Kumara-Kumari Hills. Boy Aira, who is a Jaina by birth, reaches the Fort with Karuvaki and many Jaina monks to observe the ceremony. As the Arhatas and monks attempt to lift the Image from its heavy and huge stone pedestal, they find the statue made of clay and plaster, not of stone.

The Arhatas raise alarm. Ruling Chiefs and Courtiers surround the statue with wonder and curiosity to find it a fake one. In moments the statue crumbles and falls to ground and is shattered to pieces.

A Chief "Oh God ! What a treachery ! What a heinous deception in name of faith and friendship ! Accursed be the king who sent this false Idol!"

All onlookers stand aghast. Whispers spread from person to person in and outside the Fort to cause angry reaction.

Second Chief "This is only a small part of gigantic design, it seems. Are the Magadhans coming to invade us ? Let the Courtiers assemble for with to discuss the situation in Court."

Sugatra "This is the signal of the coming of Chandasoka. A time of reckoning has come at last !"

Boy Aira (*excited*) "Some day the deceivers will have to pay back the price of their deception. A day of reckoning must come for Magadh too."

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Aira kneels down over the shattered pieces of the clay image. He weeps. Karuvaki lifts him up.

Karuvaki "Come dear Aira, come back. First grow up in age and next think of the future. Come".

The monks weep over the pedestal while chanting the hymns. Trumpets are blown outside to signal the meeting of the Court.

Scene 10

Night : Chilika

In the night, the Kalingan naval officers with myriads of soldiers are getting into the waiting boats on lake Chilika, bound for distant destinations. Hundreds of women on the shore are performing arati *to bid them farewell. The ships move out and sail towards deep seas and vanish on the horizon.*

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Episode Thirty-One

Commentary: Asoka's war with Kalinga turns out as one of the bloodiest wars of ancient history. The people of Kalinga fight with a grim determination to defend their freedom. For them it becomes a veritable peoples' war. For Asoka, it becomes a war of extermination. His infamous name Chandasoka is amply justified in the battle fields of Kalinga.

Scene 1

Kalinga Frontier Fort **5 Mauryan Generals, Kalinga Commandants**

Five Mauryan army officers on horseback arrive at the gate of the Kalingan frontier fort of Gorathgiri on the southern end of the Magadhan Empire. They carry white flags and are without arms. They are taken inside the fort by the Kalinga guards where they present their insignia to the commandants.

Maurayan Officer "We are deputed by Emperor Asoka on a good-will mission to Toshali. We seek your hospitality in your fort of Gorathagiri before we proceed on our journey tomorrow."

Commandant "Dear friends ! You are welcome to our place as our guests. We shall offer all facilities for your onward journey to our distant capital."

The guards take the Mauryans to a rest-room.

Scene 2

Night: Fort: Interior

In the dead of the night, the Mauryan army men struggle their way towards the secret doors of the fort beneath massive walls. With considerable difficulty they open the doors.

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Scene 3

Behind the fort wall a big Mauryan force is seen ready to enter. They enter silently and move towards different strategic locations. They set fire to stables, godowns and elephant shelters. They overpower the guards at the front gate and open it for more Mauryan troops to pour in.

As big fires break out inside the fort, the sleeping Kalingan soldiers get up in surprise. In darkness and confusion, they run towards their arsenals for arms. In surprising suddenness, the Mauryan soldiers attack their enemies and slaughter the unarmed Kalingans. A grim struggle continues. Some of Kalinga soldiers escape with horses, fighting through enemy circles and fires, towards the highway. Prince Vitasoka on horseback conducts the operation against the enemy.

Vitasoka — "Do not spare a single life. Massacre the enemy and capture their horses and elephants as well as their arms and weapons."

A Kalinga captain runs at him to attack, but is speared down by a Magadhan.

Dying Captain — "Soldiers ! Fight to the last man. Some of you run out to the hilltop to signal of the enemy invasion. Run to the next nearest fort to inform of the treacherous attack."

He falls dead.

Scene 4

Night: Hilltop

Kalingan guards send signals from hilltops by waving burning torches to the frontier guards on other hills. Flames of fire rise to dark sky from hills ranging over far distances.

Scene 5

Highway

Kalingan horsemen are galloping in top speed while shouting at the passersby and forest dwellers in the neighbouring areas of the highway.

Horsemen — "Magadhans have invaded our land. Raise obstacles on the highway and on hill passes. Resist them as best as possible."

Batch after batch of Kalinga soldiers gallop forward through jungle paths.

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Scene 6

Toshali Court **Kalinga Chiefs, Courtiers, Generals**

Looking grim and sad, the Kalinga Chiefs face the Court as the courtiers and generals stand in sullen silence.

Chief "The worst disaster has struck Kalinga. Chandasoka has unmasked his face. His army is already in our land. But the brave people of this country know how to dig graves for the Magadhans. In a struggle between the good and the evil, it is the good that triumphs."

The courtiers raise the slogan "Death to Chandasoka", "Death to Traitors", "Death to Invaders".

Chief "The Ruling Council issues the following decrees. Ships be despatched to Suvarnadwipa with courtiers to inform our generals of the grave situation in the homeland and ask them to come back with the army immediately. Drummers be despatched to every corner of Kalinga to ask the people to take up arms. The existing army be employed to throw back the invaders before they advance towards Toshali. Let this be a veritable Peoples' War — a War to kill and die."

Courtiers "Victory be to Kalinga, Death be to Magadh."

Scene 7

Council Hall **Kalinga Chiefs, Sugatra**

Prince Sugatra meets the Kalinga Chiefs in their Council Chamber.

Sugatra "My Lords ! Do as I know, the Magadhans never obey any rules of a decent battle ever since the days of King Ajatasatru. To them, wars have no ethics. They believe in the gospels of Kautilya that the end justifies the means. I have every reason to believe that hundreds of enemy agents have spread over the Kalinga country for works of sabotage. Who knows, there might be hundreds of trained *Vishakanyas* to poison our generals to death. Chandasoka can go to any extent."

Chief "But we should fight a virtuous war according to the principles as laid down in our shastras. We shall fight and die as heroes. We do not want victory at the cost of virtue."

Sugatra "It is your freedom to fight as you like. As for myself and my followers, we can at least play a small role in this great battle by hounding out the disguised Magadhans who must have begun their operation to cause trouble. Give us a cavalry force to detect and fall upon the saboteurs."

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Chief "Our soldiers will be with you. Play your noble role in this struggle of the virtuous against the wicked."

Scene 8

Countrysides

Kalinga drummers on horseback ride fast through countrysides asking people to take up arms. People respond with wild cheers and run from place to place with arms in hand.

Scene 9

Forests

Forest-dwellers march out in troops with battle axes, spears, and bows and arrows in battle formation. Tribal Chiefs with their fighters take up position on hilltops. They heap up boulders and stones on hills on either side of the enemy passage through their hill tracts.

Scene 10

Hill Pass

A Magadhan cavalry under Prince Vitasoka rides below the Meghasana range of hills to reach the plains of Kalinga. As it approaches and enters into a narrow hill pass, the Kalingan tribal fighters roll down from hilltops huge boulders. Many of Vitasoka's men perish under the showers of heavy stones. Tribal archers shower arrows on the invaders from inside dense forests and from tree tops. Vitasoka orders a retreat, unable to advance.

Scene 11

Army Parade Ground **Asoka, Army**

Outside Pataliputra, on an unending stretch of land, are standing three lakhs of soldiers, line after line, as far as the eyes can see. Asoka rises to a raised platform to address his soldiers.

Asoka "Generals and soldiers of Magadh ! In five days from now, we march forward towards the heart of the enemy land. Our advance parties have captured the frontier hill-forts of Kalinga and also have paved the path for you through the hill passes to roll upon the plains.

"You are marching upon Kalinga as the soldiers of Bharat to complete the mission of Guru Chanakya and Chakravarti Chandragupta in building the great Chakravarti-Kshetra of Bharatavarsha encompassing every piece of land from the lofty Himalayas to the deep seas. Your Emperor is

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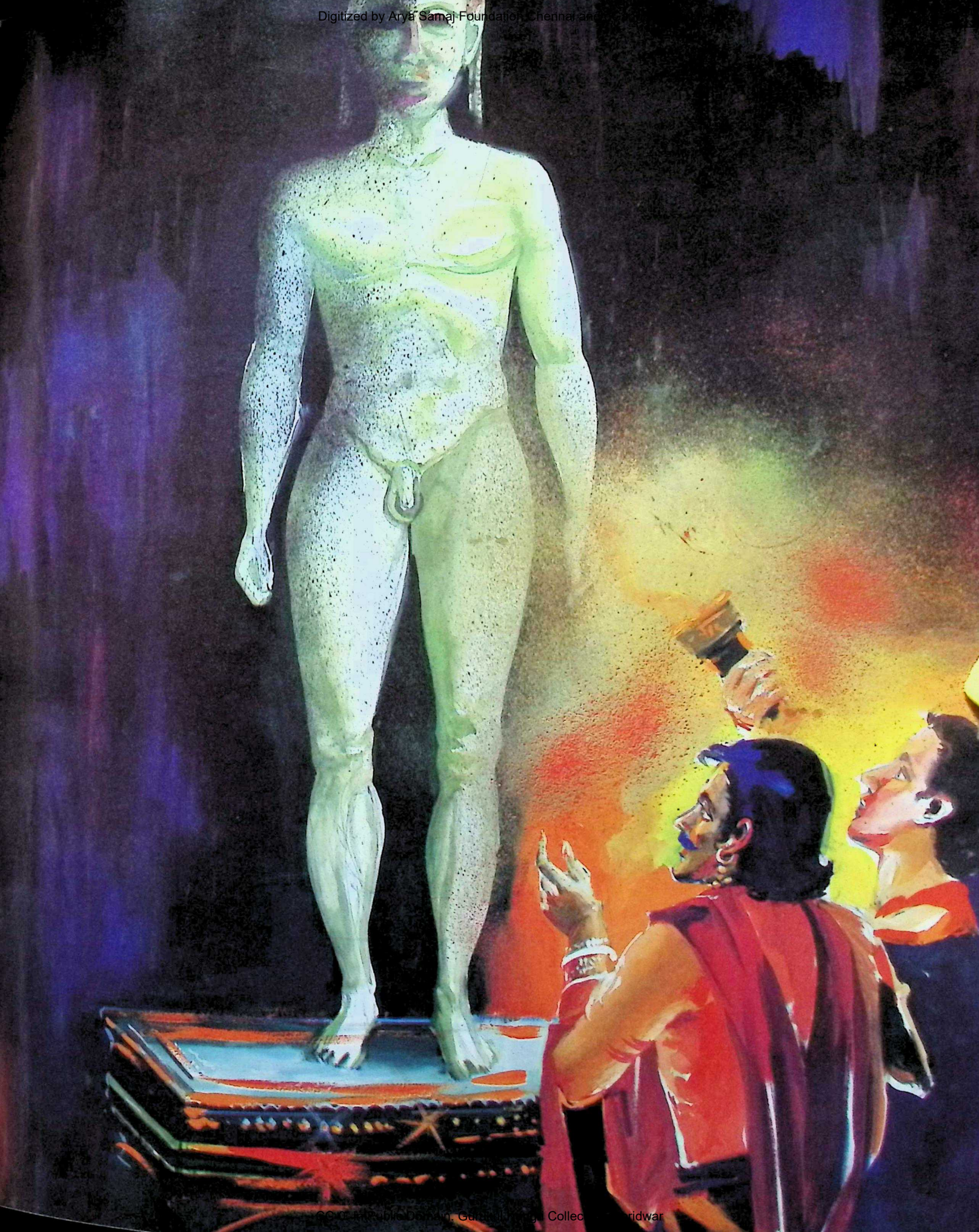

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Kalinga Women Worshipping Ships Boita Bandana Ceremony

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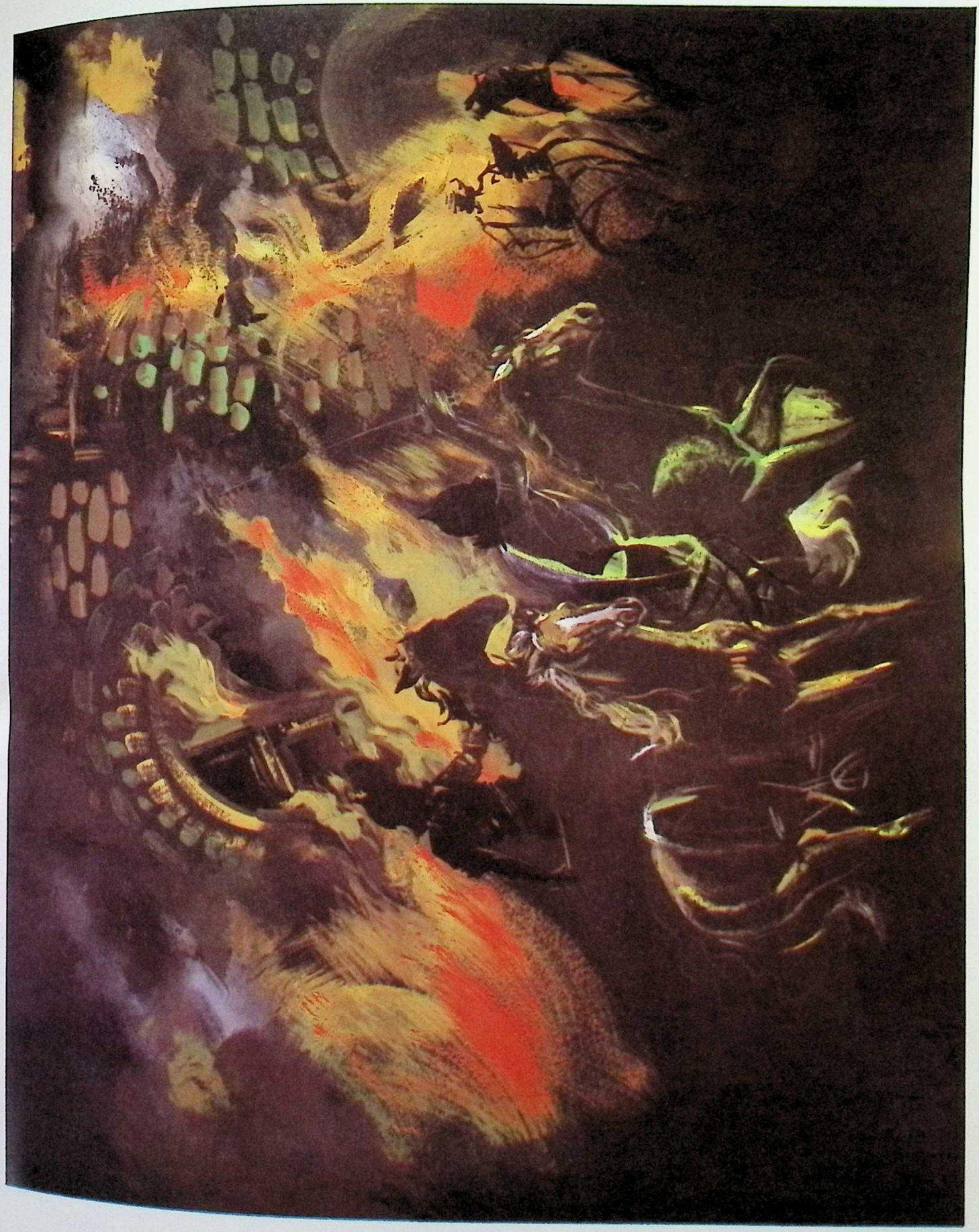

Night Attack on Gorathgiri Fort

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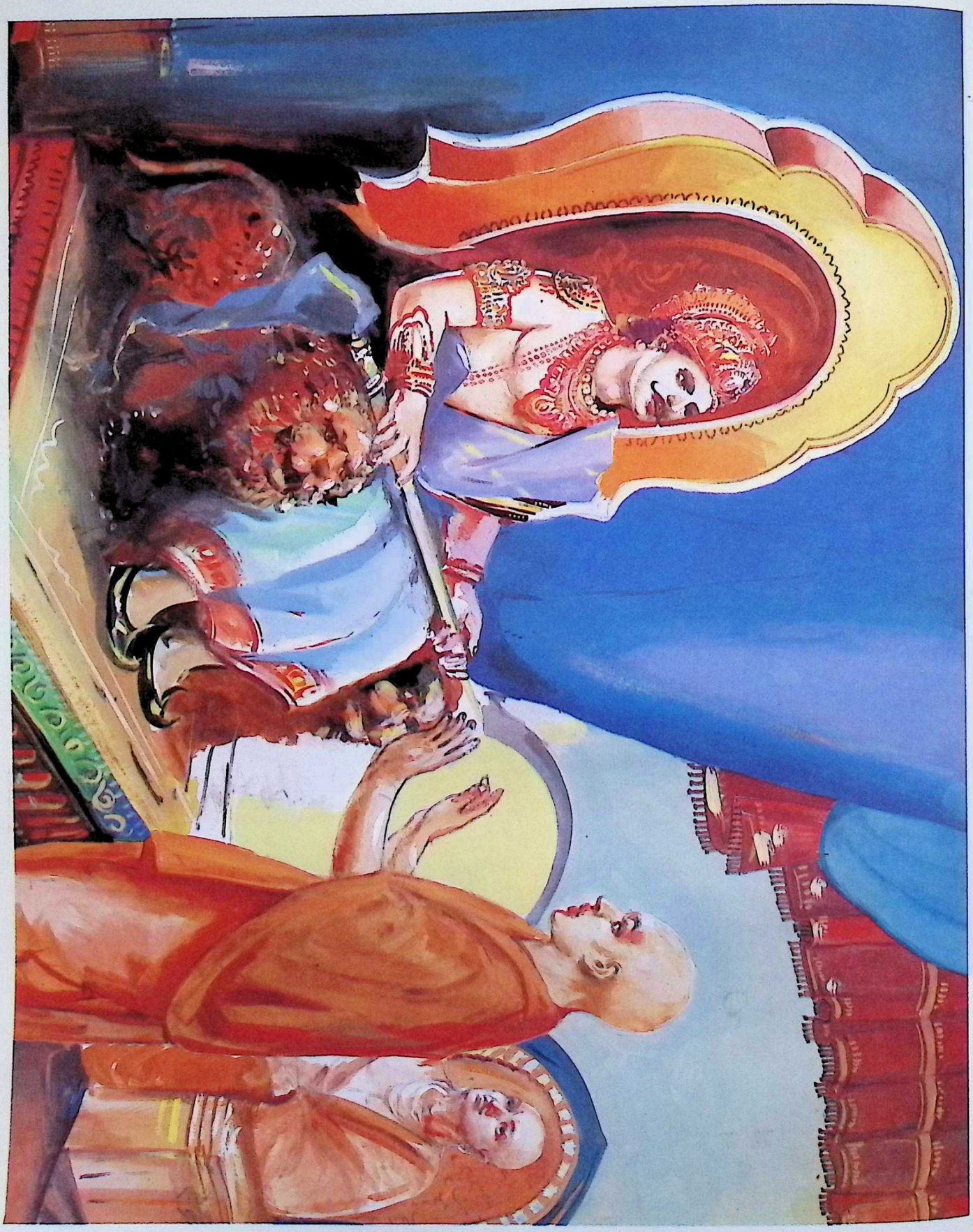

Sannyasi Upagupta Advising Asoka Not to Fight a War Against Kalinga

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your supreme senapati to lead you to victory for fulfilling the dreams of the past.

"Be aware of the fact that with you are the resources of a mighty empire extending from the Greek world to the river Brahmaputra on eastern horizon. Armies are coming from every centre of this landmass, from Gandhara, Taxila and Indraprastha, from Ujjayini, Prayag and Gaya. Be it known to you that your enemy country possesses a smaller army to face us. In their supreme greed to grab new lands in Suvarnadwipa, they have despatched the major part of their army to unknown places across the ocean. Be sure, therefore, that an easy victory awaits you on the soil of your enemy. Soon shall you enjoy the fall of Toshali.

"Feel confident that your Emperor is in your front. Rejoice that the Kalingans have no King to fight with your King. Get ready and feel happy to march ahead to victory, and to return as the conquerors of Kalinga."

Tumultuous cheers from the generals and soldiers greet the Emperor.

Scene 12

Sanchi Monastery **Devi, Mahindra, Sanghamitra, Upagupta**

Inside the Buddhist Monastery at Sanchi, a sorrowful Vidisha Devi with her son and daughter discusses with Sannyasi Upagupta about the impending war. Upagupta looks sad and depressed.

Upagupta "So, at last, this land of Siddhartha Buddha will see a macabre dance of death to be enacted by Emperor Asoka ! I stagger to think of it. Oh Lord ! Is it your desire that this sacred land will be washed away and flooded by rivers of human blood !"

He heaves a sigh of grief and looks at Devi's tearful eyes.

Devi "Guru Dev ! Should you not act when still there is time ? Will not the Buddha be pleased if you prevail upon the Emperor to cry a halt to his march ? Your wise words to him may serve the Lord's Will. There is none else in this land to carry the voice of human conscience to my reckless husband except your noble self !"

Devi sobs.

Mahindra "In case the Emperor does not pay heed to the words of our revered Guru, I shall lead an army of monks to stand on his way."

Sanghamitra "I, too, can lead an army of nuns to raise the cries of peace to drown his battle-cry."

Upagupta (*Smiling*) "None of you can resist your father's armies. Instead, if the worst of

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worst happens and your father goes to fight his bloody battles, you two can lead an army of monks and nuns to serve the victims of his cruelty.''

Scene 13

Asoka' Audience Hall **Asoka, Radhagupta, Upagupta**

Sannyasi Upagupta appears before Asoka and Radhagupta and takes his seat. Asoka looks impatient. Radhagupta presents an unhappy face. Upagupta's face is serene and grave.

Asoka ''Sannyasi ! You robbed me of my dear son Mahindra, a future Chakravarti Emperor of Bharat ! I hear, you have made him a Bhikshu who begs from door to door in my kingdom for a morsel of food. You have robbed the richest Emperor on earth of his dear daughter and have made her a Bhikshuni, also to beg from house to house to collect grain for your Sangha. What else do you propose to take away from Asoka ?''

Upagupta ''Your Noble Majesty ! It is by the Will of Tathagata Buddha that a Prince of His land is today a Bhikshu and a Princess is a Bhikshuni. It is the desire of the Lord that they come out of the unreal to the real to kindle the lamps of enlightenment in human souls. I have come to your presence on their behalf and on behalf of Devi Sakya Kumari to offer prayers to retreat from your march towards violence. Emperor, the destiny of Bharat is now in your hand; you can save it from disaster if you please.''

Radhagupta ''Sannyasi ! For more than three hundreds years the wise men of this country have debated upon the issues of the real and the unreal. While you think of this life as unreal, we think of the living of this life as real. Since living is real, one has to live for duty. A king's duty is to conquer. It is the duty of a Kshatriya to fight. You say, the destiny of Bharat is in our Emperor's hand. Yes, it is. To fulfil the cause of that destiny that Samrat Asoka is on his path towards violence.''

Upagupta ''Mahamantriji ! The life of every creature is sacred. Would you, for sake of your conquest, disregard the sanctity of life in hundreds and thousands of living beings ? Can you not conquer the Kalinga people by love and goodness ? Can you not embrace them as your own ?''

Asoka bursts into laughter. Radhagupta smiles with a cunning look.

Asoka ''Sannyasi ! You have come to a wrong person to advise him to love his foes. I have no mercy for a race that has ever regarded Magadh as their enemy ! It is not by love but by blood that I want to overcome them.''

Upagupta ''This great war will be like a sacrilege committed upon the soul of Bharat — a soul that breathes the eternal bliss of heavenly peace.''

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Radhagupta — "The soul of Bharat cries for yet another bliss — the bliss of solemn unity of all her children. How would you account for the disunity of Bharat with the existence of an independent country within her destined bounds ?"

Upagupta — "The unity of this sacred land of sages and seers is a unity of mind and heart of all the people of Bharat — the Bharata-Santatih. It is eternal and sublime, spiritual and heavenly. It rests on the soul force of this country as represented through the Vedas and the Shastras, and as sanctified by the voices of a Valmiki or a Vyasa, a Buddha or a Mahavira ! This indestructible unity of an indestructible people does not rest on the swords of the conquerors or the decrees of the victors !"

Loud sounds of trumpets and drums are heard from outside. Asoka stands up. So, too, Radhagupta.

Radhagupta — "Sannyasi, It is time for the Emperor to leave the capital. May you please carry the news to Sanchi that Emperor Asoka is on his way to Kalinga !"

Upagupta goes out in silent steps.

Scene 14

At the gate of the palace, Asoka enters into a waiting chariot amidst deafening sounds of trumpets, drums and cheers from the crowd. Upagupta looks on as the chariot runs forward.

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Episode Thirty-Two

Commentary: Kalinga War turns more and more violent as the days advance. Entire people of Kalinga fight a grim war against the invaders. Thousands of Buddhist monks and nuns come to the battle-fields of Kalinga to attend to the dying and the wounded. Asoka's cruelty reaches ghastly magnitude.

Scene 1

Night: Outside Pataliputra **Basavadatta, Upagupta**

Outside Pataliputra at a distance from the highway, Sannyasi Upagupta is lying quietly beneath a tree and observing the marching out of the Mauryan troops in the darkness of night. The sound of trumpets and drums resounds in sky. Upagupta closes his eyes as the night advances. A death-like silence descends on the place as the moon rises high.

A small chariot drawn by a single horse appears on the highway carrying Rajanartaki Basavadatta on her way home. Her eyes fall on the calm face of the sleeping Sannyasi and on his bare body shining bright under moonlight. She gets down from the chariot and walks towards the Sannyasi. She observes his handsome body with lustful eyes and places her hand on the Sannyasi's arm. Upagupta opens his eyes.

Basavadatta — "Darling ! This is not the place for you to spend this beautiful night when Basavadatta's door is open to you. Instead of lying on the sands and rocks under a tree, you may find a bed of roses at your disposal. May I help you to my chariot !"

Upagupta — "Basavadatta ! Sister, may I know who you are !"

Basavadatta — "You seem to be a stranger not to know my name. I am Basavadatta, the Rajanartaki. My name is in thousands of lips and my face appears in dreams of thousands ! Isn't my face sweet to your beautiful eyes ?"

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Upagupta "Yes, it is sweet indeed ! As sweet as lotus !"

Basavadatta "Sweet-heart ! Let my face and body be for you for this sweet night. Please come to my home."

Upagupta "Sister ! I shall come to your home in some other night when you may need me more dearly, but not in this night.

Upagupta turns his side and closes his eyes to sleep. Basavadatta stands up angrily.

Basavadatta "When princes vie with each other to see my face, and generals draw out their swords to fight each other to touch my body, I pity you stranger for turning away your face from the presence of Basavadatta !"

She goes back to her chariot.

Scene 2

Night: Basavadatta's Bedroom **Basavadatta, 3 Soldiers**

On her splendid bed, Basavadatta is enjoying a sound sleep when in midnight three soldiers break open the doors and dash inside by brushing aside the women guards outside. They wake up Basavadatta in a rude manner.

Soldier "We have been ordered to take you with the other dancers to the army camp and from there to Kalinga to entertain our generals. Get up and get ready."

Basavadatta "Oh, no, no, no. I cannot leave my home. I cannot go to battle fronts. Tell your generals that the body and beauty of Basavadatta are too precious to be wasted and spoiled in a distant land ! Go back please."

Soldier "If you do not come with us, we have the order to carry your nose and ears in a plate. Should we then remove these precious limbs from your beautiful face ?"

A soldier takes out a dagger and holds it before her eyes.

Basavadatta "Oh God ! How vile are these generals ! They need women even when death stares at their faces ?"

Soldier "Do not waste your time and our time. This is war ! If we are going to give our life and limbs, why should you fear to show us your body to please us ? Come, or stay behind without your nose and ears."

Basavadatta gathers her attire to get ready to go.

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Scene 3

Mountain Pass **Asoka, Army, Kalingan Tribals**

Asoka, followed by cavalry and infantry, enters into a narrow mountain pass of the Meghasana range. From high altitudes on either side, the tribals roll down boulders and stones and shower arrows on the advancing army. Many of Asoka's soldiers fall dead. With much difficulty the Magadhans make way through the pass for the chariot of Asoka to cross over to the other side.

Asoka's eyes fall on the numerous scattered huts of the forest-dwellers stretching far down the mountains and hills. Looking over the heaps of his own dead behind his chariot, he trembles in anger.

Asoka "Massacre these forest-dwellers without mercy. Reduce their villages and shelters to ashes. Let other hill-dwellers get a lesson from the fate of these barbarians. Have no pity for their women or children."

Bands of soldiers ride fast in the direction of the visible villages with burning torches in hand.

Fire rises to high skies at the foot of the hills. Soon it spreads to thick forests around and on the hills and mountains.

Scene 4

Night: Chilika Lake **Yasas, His Agents, Kalinga Couriers**

Inside the fast-moving small boats on the Chilika Lake the Kalinga couriers are getting ready for their onward journey to Suvarnadwipa with urgent message from the Ruling Chiefs to the generals of the colonies. Yasas and his agents, in disguise as fishermen get into the boats in the thick of darkness and hide behind the cargo. The boats sail towards the deep sea, carried in speed by blown up sails under strong wind. The couriers fall asleep while a few sailors guide the course of the boats, moving side by side. Suddenly come out Yasas and his agents and fall upon the couriers and sailors. Jumping from boat to boat, they kill the couriers and sailors and throw their bodies to waves. They escape in one boat, leaving other boats to sink without sailors.

Scene 5

River Bank

Behind a huge earthen embankment of river Bolang, and army of Asoka is resting for the night. The Kalingan villagers dig out the earth from the opposite side of the embankment to release gushing water to wash away the sleeping enemy. While many Magadhans are swept away with the bursting of the water reservoir, many others escape to safety. In retaliation, they burn down the villages around the place.

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Scene 6

Battle Field

A grim battle is fought between the Magadhan and the Kalingan soldiers in an open field. The Kalingan elephants play havoc to the invading army. Trained war-elephants lift Magadhans by trunk and throw them to death.

Scene 7

Sanchi Monastery **Upagupta, Devi, Mahindra, Sanghamitra, Monks, Nuns, Kalinga Monk.**

Thousands of Buddhist monks and nuns are sitting in tense silence, row after row, on a vast open ground adjacent to the monastery at Sanchi. Facing them in their front are seated Sannyasi Upagupta, Vidisha Devi, Mahindra, Sanghamitra and a Monk from Kalinga.

Upagupta "It is the Will of the Lord that we go from Sanchi's serene face to the war-torn face of distant Kalinga to preach our Master's message of non-violence to the men of violence. We shall walk over the mire of blood to reach the wounded and the sick. We shall reach the homes and hearths of the distressed and the helpless. Let our mission be the mission of solace to the people of a war-ravaged land. Let our voice be the voice of peace against the mad fury of the forces of evil. Let each one of you be an angel of light against the darkness that prevails."

Upagupta wipes tears from his eyes.

Devi "It is also the Will of the Enlightened One that we march to Kalinga as the soldiers of Sannyasi Upagupta who represents the conscience of mankind in this sacred land of Bharat."

Kalinga Monk "Dear brethren of the Sangha ! I come from the very place of Kalinga which preserves the Holy Tooth Relic of the Buddha. The monks of Dantapuri are shocked to see what this war has done to a holy land. The invaders have gone there not to conquer a country, but to annihilate an entire race. They are not fighting against the soldiers of the enemy country, but are killing the old and the young, men and women. Never did Bharat see such violence and never did her children suffer such cruelty. The Kalinga Buddhists invite you to their desolate land to demonstrate that the people of this country are with them."

Mahindra "Venerable Monk ! Today, the entire Buddhist Sangha looks at Kalinga in agony and sorrow. We shall be soon in your land to stand by the sufferers."

Kalinga Monk "Bhikshu Mahindra ! May the humanity realise that while a father represents the darkest aspect of earthly life, his son represents the brightest

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aspect of man's spiritual existence. Posterity will ever remember you and Sanghamitra as much as it will remember King Asoka. Let us offer prayers to Buddha and begin our Journey.''

Sanghamitra begins the prayer. Monks and nuns sing the song of love and compassion. They conclude with the hymn: ''Buddham Saranam Gachchhami, Dharmam Saranam Gachchhami, ''Sangham Saranam Gachchhami.''

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Episode Thirty-Three

Commentary: The Kalinga War enters into its final phase with death and desolation reaching devastating proportion. The battles between the regular armies of Kalinga and Magadh manifest grim determination on either side to win or die.

Scene 1

Battle Field **Asoka, Kalinga General, Armies**

On a vast plain on the bank of river Vaitarani, a part of Kalinga regular army meets the advancing army of Asoka. Asoka is himself commanding his forces from his chariot. As the two sides near each other, a Kalinga general advances towards the Magadhan side, leaving his army at a distance behind. From his horseback, he looks at Asoka.

Kalinga General "Chandasoka ! You have advanced thus far not as a hero, but as a thief. You have taken us by surprise by pretending friendship while attacking like, a timid traitor. It is a work unbecoming of any king, but possible only on the part of a descendant of an upstart - the *Vamba Moriyar*. You came to the throne by killing your brothers. You killed your elder by pretending your own death, because, you had no courage to face him for fear of your life. You sent a fake Image of Jina to deceive us, because you have no faith in divine curse. You sent a fake Prime Minister to pray for peace. And, when we graciously granted it, you came out for war. Are you not a shame to all the kings of all times? Are you not a shame to your own dynasty and your own subjects? Are you not a disgrace to the holy land of Bharat ? Your cup of sin is full ! Kalinga is ready to dig the grave of Chandasoka."

Asoka thunders in rage.

Asoka "Soldiers ! Silence his voice for ever."

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Three of Asoka's generals throw their spears simultaneously at the Kalinga General. While dying, he shouts his last words at Asoka.

Kalinga General "Following the traditions of battles, I came out of my army to challenge you by words ! I did not raise my arm against you ! But, by breaking all the rules of *dharmayuddha*, you threw your arms at me. It is only an accursed Chandasoka who can fight a war devoid of the ethics of battles !"

He falls down from his horse dead. A terrible battle follows, leaving thousands dead from both sides.

Scene 2

Highway

In a small coach, driven by two horses, Upagupta, Devi, Mahindra and Sanghamitra are heading towards the battle fields of Kalinga. Behind the coach are a line of bullock carts carrying food, medicine and nursing material. Behind the bullock carts are walking a large number of Buddhist monks and nuns.

Scene 3

Battle Field **Dying Magadhan, Monk**

Inside a ghastly battle field at the end of the battle, hundreds of the wounded are struggling for life. At a spot where a dying Magadhan soldier is writhing in agony with an arrow in his chest, an old Kalingan villager is seen lifting his heavy axe to cut down his head. A Buddhist monk intervenes.

Monk (*in soft words*) "Stop, my son, stop !"

Kalingan "No, he is an enemy and I must take his life."

Monk "A dying man is nobody's enemy, but everybody's friend. Do help me to save his life."

Kalingan "Save his life ? Are you mad ?"

Monk "Every life is sacred. It is the duty of everyone to save that life from the danger of death. My dear son, rise above the self to serve the helpless. Buddha will bless you."

The monk removes the arrow from the breast of the Magadhan, wipes out his blood, and applies healing balm on his wounds. The old Kalingan looks on.

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Scene 4

Battle Field: At a Distance **Kalinga Villagers, Wounded Magadhans, Mahindra**

To the far end of the battle field, some Kalinga villagers are dragging away the wounded Magadhans to slaughter them. The Magadhans are pathetically crying for mercy. Mahindra with three monks run to the spot. With a dignified face Mahindra stands before the violent villagers.

1st Villager — "Get away, you noble monks. Do not try to preach non-violence to us. Run to Chandasoka and talk to him about Buddha. We believe in blood for blood. We have no pity for these beasts of prey. We shall kill every Magadhan brute we come across."

Mahindra — "My beloved brothers ! Violence breeds violence, sin breeds sin. No doubt you are fighting against a cruel King and his merciless soldiers. But would you not be noble and merciful towards the fallen brutes you have captured ? Do not forget that you are the children of Bharat — the land of Gautama Buddha. He is looking upon the conduct of King Asoka as well as of the noble Kalingans. His blessings will be with you if you forgive your enemies."

2nd Villager — "Monks ! Do not waste your words and waste our time. It is a war. As they kills us, so do we kill them. If they do not respect your Buddha, why should we ? If you can, go and change Chandasoka to be a good king. For us, he and his hordes of Magadhans do not deserve goodness or forgiveness."

Mahindra — "We confess, we could not change the mind of Asoka. But, may be, you can change the heart of Chandasoka by forgiving his vices. Let these Magadhans be forgiven and let them go to their master to say that the brave Kalingans are a better people to respect the sanctity of life than the Magadhans under their king ! Give your love to these victims to mark your greatness as a race."

3rd Villager — "Sermons will not do. Those who have killed our men should be killed by us."

He orders his comrades to tie up the hands of the Magadhans. The villagers force the Magadhans to kneel down with their hands tied. They raise the battle axes up above their necks to cut down their heads. The Magadhans scream in fear. Mahindra kneels down before the executioners and looks to their violent faces.

Mahindra — "Before you slaughter your prisoners, please do slaughter me first so that I do not see your violence. Let me pay with my life in the battle field of Kalinga for the sins of my father, Emperor Asoka. May Buddha bless you for your favour to this monk !"

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Village Leader "Venerable Monk ! Are you that celebrated son of Chandasoka who turned a Bhikshu ? Are you Prince Mahindra, the son of Devi Sakya Kumari, who left the palace of Pataliputra to live in a monastery in Sanchi ? Are you that apostle of non-violence who renounced an empire for the cause of peace ? Are you that Mahindra ?"

Mahindra "Yes, dear friend ! I am that unfortunate son of your great enemy, Chandasoka. Take revenge upon him by killing me. And, at the cost of my life, give your mercy to these prisoners."

Village Leader (*looking to villagers*) "Drop your axes and kneel down before this man of God."

The villagers down their arms and gather around Mahindra to observe his face. They bow down before him and sit down quietly.

Village Leader "We swear by your name that we shall take these wounded enemies with us and treat them as friends, nurse them till they recover, and send them back to their King when they want."

A Magadhan "We will better die rather than go back to the King. We have got our real monarch, our saviour and master. We shall join his army of monks to serve his cause."

The Magadhans fall at the feet of Mahindra who embraces them with tearful eyes.

The Kalingans too touch his feet and he embraces them one by one.

Mahindra "Blessed you are, my brothers in Kalinga. May the Eternal Buddha take you to His loving fold."

The Kalingans and Magadhans together sing with the monks "Buddham Saranam Gachchhami."

Scene 5

Roadside **Magadhan Wounded, Asoka's Captain**

Far away from a battle field, at the roadside, a number of bullock carts, carrying the wounded Magadhan soldiers, come to a halt. Soon appear cavalrymen from behind, led by a captain. The cavaliers pull out the wounded soldiers from their respective carts and force them to lie down on grass. Many of the wounded have no legs or hands or other limbs. Most of them are badly wounded. Some are half-dead. The captain looks towards these wounded men with deadly eyes and turns towards his forces.

Captain "Soldiers ! I have the order to command you to despatch these dying men to death. They are no longer needed. It is most difficult to maintain

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them and carry them forward.''

The captain rides away. His soldiers pierce their spears on the bodies of their comrades in quick operation. Shrierking cries rise to the sky.

Scene 6

Toshali Fort **Kalinga Chiefs, Karuvaki, Aira**

Defeat writ large on their face, the Kalingan Chiefs are waiting to receive boy Aira in their Council Chamber. Karuvaki enters with Aira.

Karuvaki ''The enemy agents have entered into the outskirts of Toshali. It is time that I remove Aira to a safer distance.''

1st Chief ''Sooner the better. Take Aira to any place of your choice, preferably to Simachalam.''

Aira ''Honoured Rulers ! I shall not go anywhere from where I live. If the enemy comes to Toshali, I shall fight and die like a hero. Boys of my age are dying fighting all over Kalinga.''

2nd Chief ''Dear Aira ! Your life is precious to the heart of every Kalingan. Your safety is the concern of all of us. Please agree to accompany Karuvaki to some other place.''

Aira ''Can Aira go into hiding like a coward ! Will your future king be unworthy of the Kalingans ? Let us face death to become deathless.''

1st Chief ''We are proud of you, Aira. Stay with Karuvaki in the vicinity of Toshali. The Tirthankaras will protect you.''

Aira and Karuvaki leave.

Scene 7

Lake Chilika: Army Camp **Kalinga Commander, Sugatra**

Inside an army camp, a Kalinga commander and Prince Sugatra are in discussion.

Commander ''How long should we have to wait for the return of our speed-couriers from Suvarnadwipa ! The Rulers are impatient for news. Our fate in the war depends on the return of the colonial armies.''

Sugatra ''It will be really disastrous if the armies do not come back in time. Why not send another batch of speed-couriers ?''

Commander ''Yes, we have to.''

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They come out of the camp and proceed to the coast.

Scene 8

Chilika Coast **Commander, Sugatra, Yasas**

The Kalinga Commander and Sugatra, followed by some soldiers, are walking along the coast of Chilika towards the location of the speed-boats. Crowds of traders and sailors are busy with their activities. Sugatra's eyes catch a person who appears to be known. He looks suspicious. Sugatra walks fast to reach the man. He is Yasas, in disguise as a fisherman. Some other Magadhans near him are also in disguise.

Sugatra (*looking at Yasas*) "Halt, you fisherman ! We would have some talk with you."

Yasas and his followers start running in full speed. Sugatra and the commander run behind them. At a distance, Yasas finds a trader coming on horse. He throws down the trader and takes to his horse. Sugatra and the commander ride behind him. Yasas' men are rounded up by Kalingan soldiers.

From the long coast line Yasas reaches the highway running towards the river Daya at a great distance. He whips his horse to run faster as the Kalinga Commander and Sugatra try to overcome him.

Scene 9

Bank of Daya **Yasas, Commander, Sugatra, Soldiers**

On the bank of river Daya, the horse carrying Yasas stumbles over a boulder and falls to ground. Yasas too falls flat, bleeding with injury. As he looks up, he finds Sugatra and the Kalinga commander standing near him with swords pointed at his neck. Kalingan cavalrymen also reach the spot and surround the enemy who is totally exhausted and spent up.

Sugatra (*to commander*) "It is a known face. And, a dangerous face. If I can remember correctly, I perhaps saw this face for a moment in the hideout of brother Susima in a dark night when he appeared there as a dying merchant of Kasi !"

Commander "A saboteur near Chilika ! He must have gone there to do something big !"

Sugatra "Extract the information from his throat before you tear it apart."

Yasas is lifted up from ground and is made to sit of a rock. Soldiers encircle him with naked swords in hand.

Commander "Speak the truth if you want to escape torture !"

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A fast galloping Kalinga soldier reaches the spot and gets down. He looks at the commander, perspiring heavily.

Soldier "Commander ! The captured Magadhans have confessed that under this man named Yasas, they killed the couriers on speed-boats while on their way to colonies. They managed to kill each and all of them, and drowned their small boats."

Commander "Oh God ! The worst of the sabotages had been done so easily ! What will happen to us if our message did not reach the colonies !"

He gives a violent kick to Yasas.

Sugatra "So, you are the demon Yasas, the dreaded dog of your master ! You are that bloody rogue who raised a fake revolt in Taxila ! Is not it ? It is worthwhile to see your face before it loses the eyes, nose and ears !"

Sugatra comes very near to Yasas, gives him a terrific slap and bends down over his head to observe his face. In a twinkle of the eye, Yasas takes out a small needle from his false hair and pushes it to Sugatra's body. Sugatra raises his agonising death cry, turns blue and sinks to ground dead. The commander and others stand aghast.

Commander "Soldiers ! Pull out his nails, cut out his fingers, torture him to your heart's satisfaction, and throw his dead body to the waters of Daya."

Commander leaves the spot. His soldiers take out daggers to perform their job.

Scene 10

Night: River Bank **Karuvaki**

Karuvaki is taking bath in the water of river Daya as the moon shines in the sky. Her eyes fall on a floating human body in the middle of the river. She swims swiftly to catch the body. Struggling against strong currents, she finally succeeds in dragging the body by foot and swims back to the ghat. She shouts at her companions, waiting for her on the bank. The body of Yasas is lifted and carried away towards a distance.

Scene 11

Karuvaki's House **Karuvaki, Yasas**

Inside a neat small room, Yasas is lying on floor on a mat. His body bears many deep wounds. His fingers and ears are missing. Karuvaki is attending upon him with compassion and care. Yasas opens his eyes and finds Karuvaki sitting near his head in prayerful posture.

Yasas (*inaudible voice*) "Am I still alive !"

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Karuvaki "Brother ! For three days you are fighting against death while I am praying to the Tathagata to save your life ! He has heard my prayers. You are alive."

Karuvaki kneels down to offer prayers to Buddha.

Yasas "Are you an angel to return life to a dead man ?"

Karuvaki "The Lord has restored life to your body. Please be calm and think of Him."

Yasas "God is far away in the Heaven. My enemies may be nearer to reach me soon."

Karuvaki "Nobody is your enemy now. Here you will see only your brothers and sisters !"

Yasas "Brothers and sisters !"

He closes his eyes. Karuvaki begins her prayer.

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Magadhan Army Passing Through Mountain Pass: Kalingan Tribals Rolling Down Huge Stones from Hilltop

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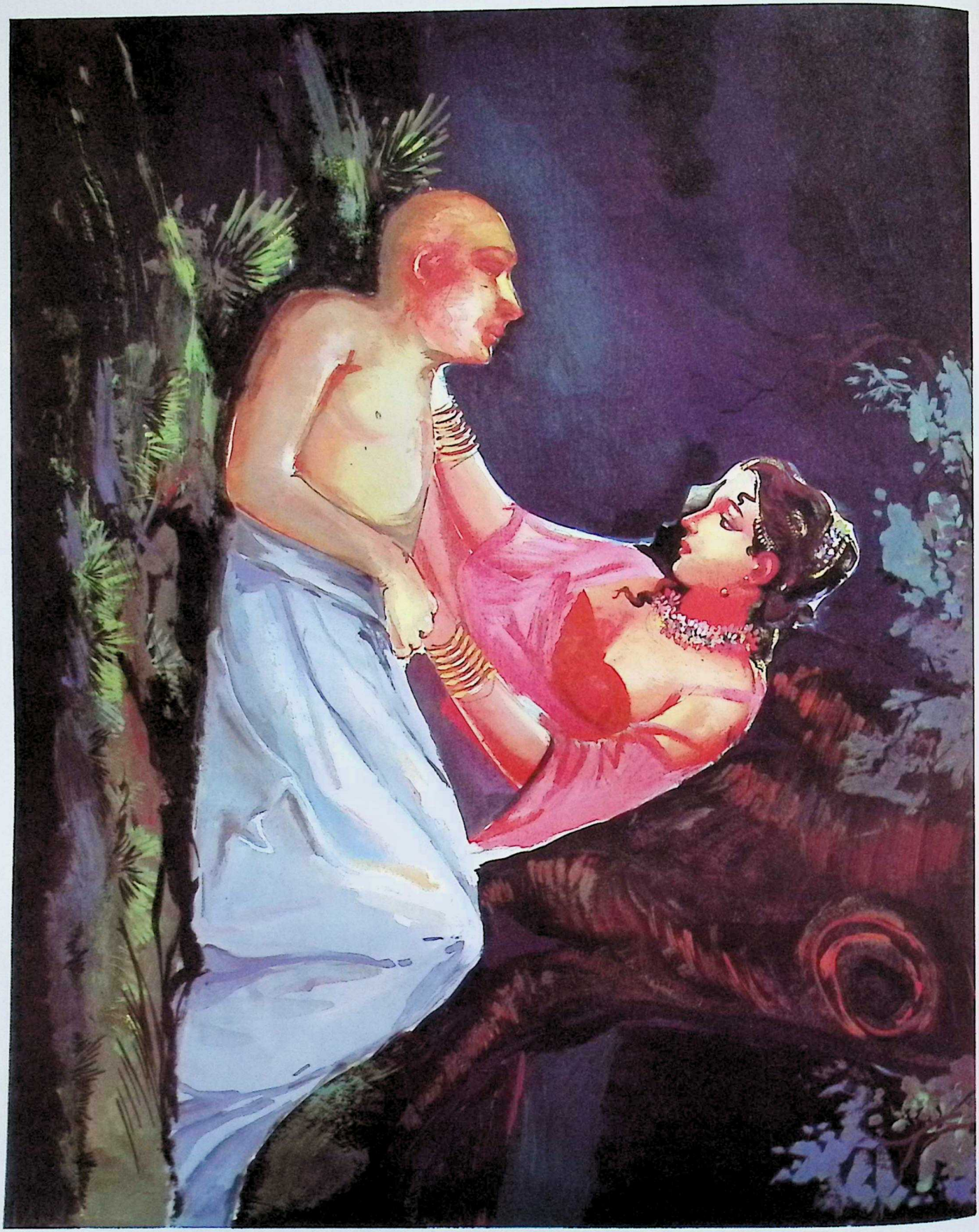

Basavadatta Inviting Sannyasi Upagupta to Her House

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Kalinga Elephants Charging Asoka's Soldiers in Battle

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A Kalinga General Challenging Asoka Outside Battlefield

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Sannyasi Upagupta, Devi, Mahindra and Sanghamitra Heading for Kalinga Battlefield to Nurse the Wounded

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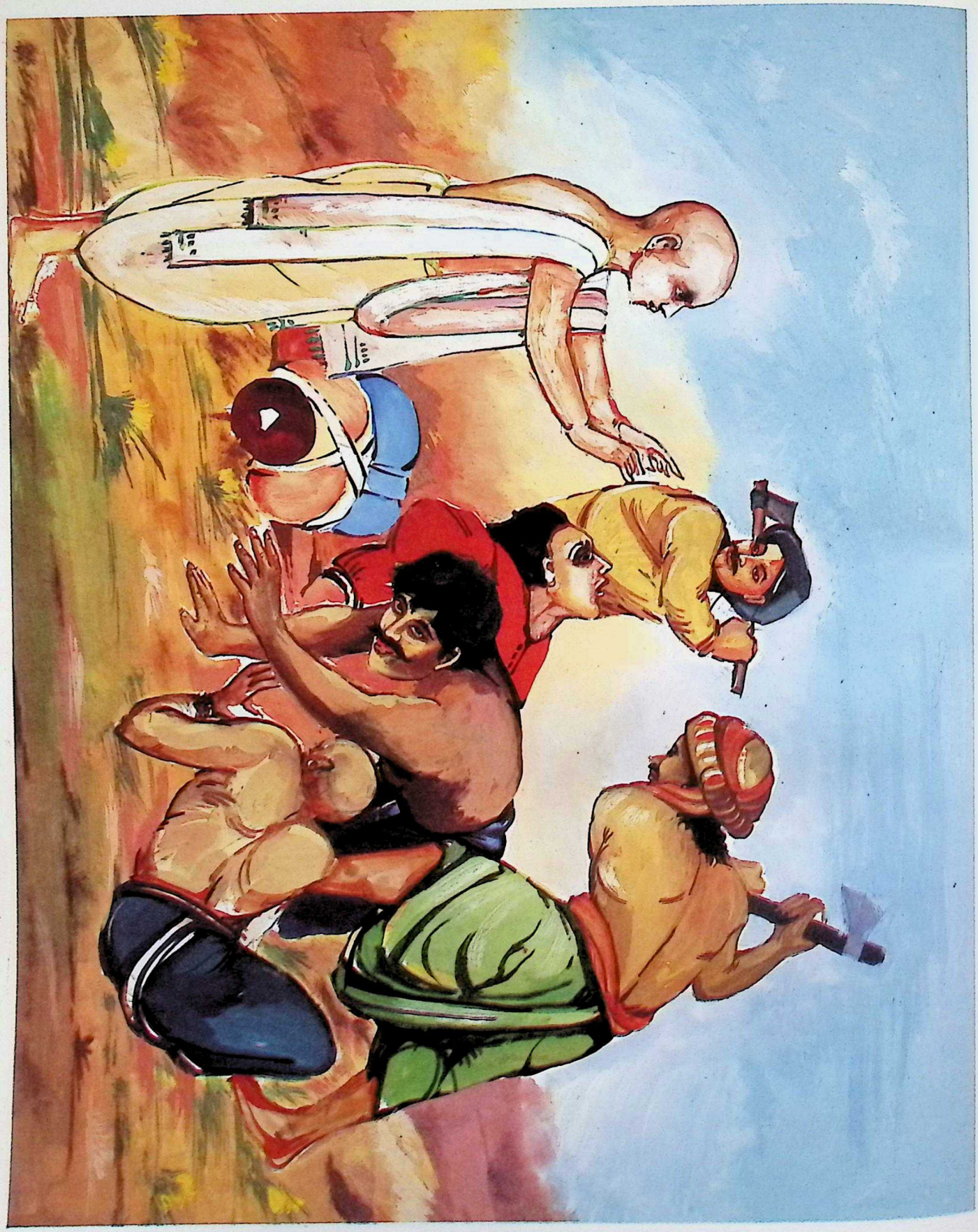

Mahindra Appeals to Kalinga Villagers to Spare the Lives of Magadhan Captives

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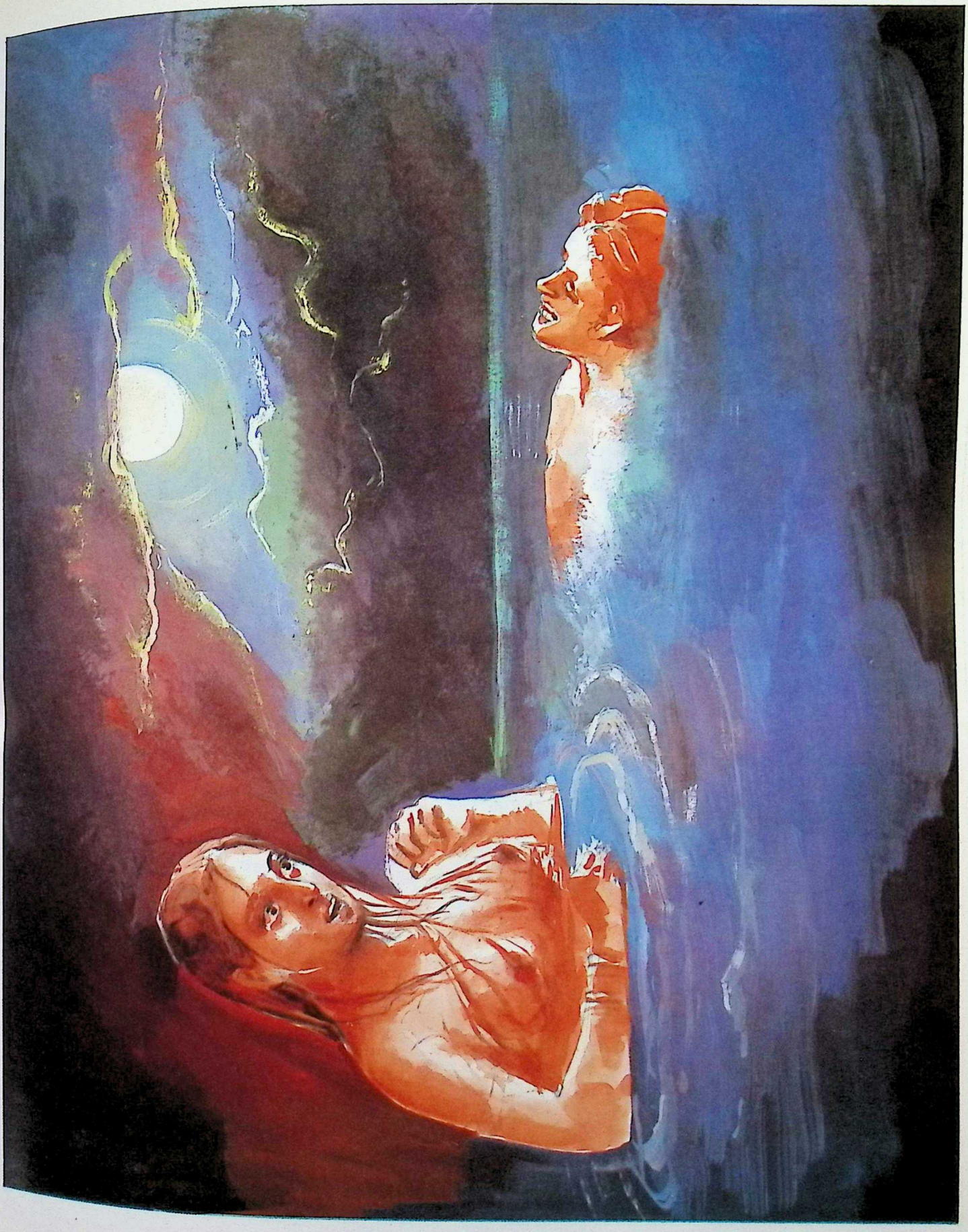

Karuvaki Finds the Floating Body of Yasas in the River

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A Kalinga Ruler Brought to Asoka as a Prisoner

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Episode Thirty-Four

Commentary: The determined resistance of the Kalingan people delays the advance of the Magadhan army. Apprehensive of the homecoming of the Kalingan forces from their distant colonies, the Magadhans resort to extreme means to cow down the people and march forward. In result, the civilian casualties turn many times more than the army casualties. Asoka's army at last reaches the outskirts of Toshali.

Scene 1

Asoka's Tent **Asoka, 3 Generals, A Captured Kalinga Chief**

Inside an army tent adjacent to a battle field, Asoka hears from his generals about the problems and prospects of the war. A captured Kalingan Chief is taken to his presence after his discussion with the generals ends.

Asoka — "Why is it that in spite of the enormous number of my soldiers, our progress towards the Kalinga Capital is slow and discouraging?"

1st General — "It is because of the resistance of the common people at every place. We find it rather easier to defeat the regular armies of the enemy because of their inadequate number, but it is more difficult to trace out the resistance forces of the commonfolks who hold up our march by their surprise attacks in nights."

Asoka (angry) — "Did I not ask you to break down the morale of the common people by killing them ruthlessly in their homes and villages. Destroy their resistance by destroying their lives. They are illequipped in arms and are disorganised ! Take their men and women to place them before our advancing forces to discourage the enemy from using arms against us."

2nd General — "Your Majesty ! This is being done. The civilian casualties have grown many times more than army casualties."

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Asoka "Remember, we have to conquer and destroy Toshali and force the Kalinga rulers to surrrender before their armies return from the colonies. Any delay may turn the tide of war against us. I am surprised, why do the Kalingans take so much of time to return from Suvarnadwipa !"

3rd General "Your Majesty ! We have catpured one of the Kalinga Ruling Chiefs who came to conduct the battle of Vaitarani which we won."

Asoka (*delighted*) "Bring him to my presence in chains."

The Kalinga Chief is brought in. An elderly man of robust built, with grey hair and moustache and carrying wounds on his body, the Chief stands before Asoka in a challenging posture.

Kalinga Chief "Knowing yourself what I am, you still like to see me in chains and in standing position ! Even that Yavana Alexander knew how to receive a defeated King Puru with honour and respect ! But you, as Chandasoka, do not know to honour the Ruling Chief of your enemy country who is far from knowing defeat ! I wish, I should have lost my life or the eyes before this misfortune of seeing the face of the vice-incarnate !"

Asoka "Are these the words of despair when defeat stares at the face of your country and people ?"

Kalinga Chief "What kind of victory are you going to achieve by your viceful acts ? By leading your soldiers behind women and children to face the arrows of Kalinga, you may win some battles, but can never conquer a country or subjugate a people ! A battle-field is described as a Dharma-Kshetra and a battle is called a Dharmayuddha ! This is what Vyasa taught to the warriors of Bharat ! But you have proved yourself by your acts that battles have no ethics, no morality, no virtue. Invader, there is still time for you to change the mode of your warfare! Fight, if you can, as a virtuous warrior. Show yourself as a righteous man while fighting against your enemy. Follow the principles of Dharmayuddha."

Asoka "Old Man ! May I draw your mind to Kurukshetra which was called Dharmakshetra ! What did the Dharmaraja Yudhisthira do to deceive his preceptor Dronacharya ? Did he not speak the worst lie "Ashwasthama Hata, Iti Gaja'? Did not Krishna hide the sun by His Chakra to lure Jayadratha to death ? Did not the seven virtuous warriors — the Sapta-rathi — kill the boy Abhimanyu by breaking all codes of morality ? To me, any act is virtuous if it is intended to win victory. We go by the principles of Kautilya."

Kalinga Chief "I know, there is no place for morality in the mind of the disciples of Kautilya who are prepared to adopt any means to serve the end in view. But, I think, even Kautilya did not prescribe burning down of human settlements and killing of innocent populations to win a war ! May I request you on behalf of my government to desist from the atrocities you are committing in Kalinga ? While our people are nursing the wounded

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Magadhans, your soldiers are killing our unarmed men and women irrespective of age Invader, have you not justified your name Chandasoka on the soil of Kalinga ? Think over it if you have a mind to think !''

Asoka leaves his chair and stands up. He looks to his generals.

Asoka ''Keep this old man as a prisoner of war.''

Scene 2

Bank of Mahanadi **Asoka, Generals**

From an elevated mound, Asoka and his generals observe from the eastern bank of river Mahanadi the army formations of the Kalingans on the western bank.

1st General ''This is the river Mahanadi, deep and wide. Toshali is not far away from here. But, the Kalingans have gathered a huge elephant force to resist our advance on the western side of the river. Their strategy is to shower arrows on us as we try to cross the river on boats and wooden platforms. They have the advantage to hit us from the howdahs of their elephants.''

Asoka looks towards the elephant lines, standing as solid walls on the other side of the river.

Asoka ''This looks like what the Greek Invader Alexander saw on the opposite side of river Vitasta where stood the elephants of King Puru like solid walls, much higher in height than the Macedonian phalanx ! Well, we have to do the same thing what Alexander did to terrify these beasts and drive them mad by falling upon them from behind.''

2nd General ''This can be done once we cross the river. But our problem is how to cross !''

Asoka ''Cross the river at a distance from here in the darkness of the night. Burn down the villages all around the place to create confusion in the enemy ranks. Fall upon the Kalingans from behind before it is dawn.''

Scene 3

Battle Field

The Asokan army attacks the Kalingan army on the western bank of Mahanadi. A fierce battle is fought from early dawn till evening. Thousands of soliders from either side fall dead and wounded. The water of Mahanadi looks red with human blood. The battle of Mahanadi ends with the victory of the Magadhans. Asoka receives the victorious generals at the far end of the ghastly battle field while observing bloody sights with great delight.

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1st General "Your Majesty ! One more big river on the way, and thereafter, our path to Toshali is open."

Asoka "Take as many prisoners as possible. Place them in front of our forces as you advance upon Toshali."

2nd General "May my information please you in this moment of victory ! I heard from a captured Kalingan general that a Magadhan agent named Yasas has killed Prince Sugatra a few days back."

Asoka "Glory be to Yasas ! He has done the most meritorious job. I shall greet him on the ruins of Toshali."

As the sun sets and darkness descends, the soliders of Asoka run wild with burning torches to put surrounding human settlements to fire. Flames rise to the sky and sounds of human cry reach the horizon.

Scene 4

Toshali Fort **Kalinga Generals, Army**

Outside the Fort of Toshali concentrates the army of Kalinga for the defence of the capital. Thousands of war-elephants, surround the fort and take position for battle. Cavalry and infantry forces stand in battle formations to face the enemy. From the back of an elephant at the gate, the Commander-in-Chief issues orders to his army.

Commander-in-Chief "Brave Sons of Kalinga ! The hour of your supreme sacrifice for your Motherland has struck at last ! Fight till your last breath. By your death, make your race immortal. If you win the battle of Toshali, you will win the battle of Kalinga. Your brethren from Suvarnadwipa are not far from our shores.Soon they will be with us to prepare the grave for Chandasoka."

Soldiers (*in chorus*) "No defeat, no defeat. We fight for victory or death."

Commander-in-Chief "Remember, those who die for their country have no death. Their heroic spirit survives for ever to inspire the future. Get ready to face the challenge"

The soliders cheer with wild cries "Death to Chandasoka", "Victory to Kalinga".

Scene 5

Bank of River Daya

On an unending stretch of land on the bank of river Daya that flows by the Dhauli Hill in the

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proximity of Toshali a bigger part of the Kalinga army await the invaders to offer battle. Asoka descends upon the plains of Daya with myriads of his forces before his final onslaught on Toshali. The fiercest and the most relentless battle of the Kalinga War is fought on the bank of Daya. Nearly six hundred thousand men take part in this deadly struggle.

The battle of Daya continues like a fight to the finish. Thousands of fighters perish like moths in fire. As the sun goes down the horizon and the battle comes to an end, the bank of Daya presents a gruesome sight of fathomless carnage. The darkness of night descends on the battle field as piercing cries from thousands of throats rise to the sky. Soon descend on the field thousands of Buddhist monks and nuns to attend to the victims. Thousands of lamps flicker from corner to corner as the monks and nuns spread over the vast arena of death. The dark water of Daya glitters under the reflections of lamps. Sweet music of the nuns submerge the voices of the dying. The earth looks ghastly as the stars twinkle in the deep sky.

Scene 6

Dhauli Hilltop **Asoka**

Outside his tent on the top of Dhauli Hill stands Asoka along like a dark shadow. His eyes penetrate into far ditances of the battle field of Daya as far as the dim lamps of the Buddhists emit the light. The soft voice of the nuns and the fearful sound of the fallen float to his ears. Asoka looks to the earth and to the sky, towards the river and the dark horizon, standing motionless and silent.

Scene 7

Karuvaki's House : Exterior **Villagers, Karuvaki**

Angry villagers, with burning torches in hand, gather outside the house of Karuvaki and knock at the door with threatening shouts. Karuvaki comes out and stands before them fearlessly.

Village Head "Karuvaki ! Hand over that Magadhan agent to us, or else, we shall burn your house to ashes. You have sheltered an enemy who sabotaged our war efforts to disastrous extents ! How did you dare do it ? We could not punish you earlier because of the presence of Aira in the vicinity of your house. Now that the boy has run away to the battle field of Daya, we have come to tear the enemy to pieces. Hand him over to us forthwith."

Karuvaki "Do you still time to waste here instead of going to the bank of Daya to rescue your dying countrymen ? Did I not advise you to rush to the field at the nightfall ? And, you cowards, you have come to show your bravery by demanding the body of a dying Magadhan ?"

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Villagers "The enemy is still alive and you are doing your best to save him from death. We are ashamed of you. You, too, deserve death. We have come to finish him right now !"

Karuvaki "You can finish him and me anytime from now. But not your brothers crying aloud for your help on the bank of Daya ? Are not the soliders at Toshali waiting for you to join them before the enemy falls on them at the dawn ? You are proud to be living in the village of Aira as his custodians. If the boy has run away to the field to stand by the dying soldiers, will you not follow him to help him in his work ? Friends, go to the place where your presence is needed. I shall be soon joining you in your rescue operation. Go."

The crowd melts away quickly into darkness.

Scene 8

Same : Interior **Karuvaki, Yasas**

Karuvaki returns to her room where Yasas is lying in precarious condition. In the faint light of an earthen lamp her face looks pale and distressful.

Yasas "Why did you send back my killers ? I richly deserve death for all that I did in Kalinga. I want to die instead of living as a penitent sinner."

Karuvaki "Repentance is like resurrection. If you survive, one day you may prevail upon your Emperor to repent over his acts in this land so that he too may enjoy a resurrection."

Yasas "I can never see him again. But, on my behalf you can tell him that Yasas died a happier man by realising his folly and by weeping over his acts."

Karuvaki "Brother ! Your Emperor is very near to this place. He has won today his great victory on the bank of Daya. Tomorrow he will fight his battle at Toshali. Who knows, the fall of Toshali may see the end of the Kalinga War !"

Yasas (*surprised*) "Toshali ? Am I near to Toshali ? Yes, Asoka told me while sending me on this murderous mission that he shall see me on the ruins of Toshali. If he has already come thus far, please carry me to him ! Let him see the man he wants to welcome and greet !"

Karuvaki "Let me go to the bank of Daya to find the tent of your Emperor in its vicinity. Wait till tomorrow night when I can carry to Asoka the news about you."

Karuvaki comes out of the room. At the door she places two women guards.

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Episode Thirty-Five

Commentary: Asoka fights his last battle of the Kalinga War on the ground of Toshali. With the fall of Toshali the War comes to an end, but the victory opens up new vistas of unresolved problems.

Scene 1

Top of Dhauli Hill **Asoka, Army**

As the sun rises on the eastern horizon, Asoka emerges from his tent on the Dhauli Hill and looks upon his army down the slopes, ready in formation for the battle of Toshali.

Asoka "Brave Mauryans ! You have won by now many many battles. This day you have to win your final battle. The fall of Toshali will see the end of the Kalinga War. The enemy will fight to the last, but win your victory over their bodies. Feel sure of victory because of your number. Attack the Fort from all sides. Terrify their war-elephants by fire balls. Fall upon their infantry from all sides. Scale the walls to reach the ramparts of the Fort.

Capture as many prisoners as you can. Kill the Kalingans as ruthlessly as possible. May Toshali see the bloodiest of your battles. Begin your attack and fight on till you capture the enemy capital."

The generals and soliders march out towards the Fort of Toshali.

Scene 2

Toshali Fort **Kalinga Rulers, Generals, Army**

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On the rampart of the Fort stand the Kalinga Rulers, facing the Kalinga generals and soldiers standing in unending lines below the rampart. The Kalinga Commander-in-Chief addresses the army from the top.

Kalinga General "Fighters of the Soil ! Let your battle of today be an example for all time to come that a smaller number of defenders can throw back a larger number of invaders. Defend Toshali to the last drop of your blood. Kill as many enemy soldiers as you can before you are killed. Win victory by courage, be immortal by death. Go and attack the enemy before they fall upon you."

The soldiers raise deafening slogans "Victory to Kalinga", "Death to Chandasoka", and march forward to meet the enemy.

Scene 3

Down the slopes of Toshali the Kalinga soldiers spread out in battle formations as far as the bank of river Daya. Hundreds of war-elephants with archers on back guard the Fort.

Scene 4

Nearly seven hundred thousand men from both sides fight the battle for Toshali. The battle is fought over vast stretches of land from Toshali to the river bank.

Bloodshed and carnage continue till sunset. Outnumbered by the Magadhans, the Kalingan fighters fight till their fall. The invaders rush towards the Fort to launch their final ons alaught to capture it.

Scene 5

As the sun sets on the distant Kumara-Kumari Hills, the battles rage around Toshali in full fury. Huge fire balls are hurled inside the Fort. The Magadhans try to scale the walls of the Fort from different positions. The Kalingans try to throw them down from the ramparts.

Darkness descends. Flames rise to high skies from behind the high walls of the citadel. Outside, it is all confusion, resistance, death and devastation.

Scene 6

Magadhan soliders march through the broken gates of the Fort. Inside, they put to flames structure after structure, running madly with burning torches in hand. Massive buildings begin to crumble and fall as the fire spreads from place to place.

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Scene 7

Burning Hall: Interior **Kalinga Chiefs, Asoka's Generals and Soldiers**

Inside a burning hall are standing the Kalingan Chiefs in stony silence. Asokan soldiers break through the guards and surround the hall. Magadhan generals order from outside to the inmates to come out. But the stand motionless. Magadhan generals enter inside and find the Chiefs.

Magadhan General "From this moment you are our prisoners. I order you to come out before you perish in fire !"

Kalinga Chief "We are ready for self-immolation. You can see our glorious death as the unconquered Rulers of Kalinga".

The Kalinga Chiefs take out their daggers. Some of them stab themselves to death. Others attack the enemies and die. Fire balls fall from several corners. The structure crumbles to fall. Seven old and wounded Elders are carried away by the Magadhans before the roof crashes to ground. Fire and thick smoke deepen everywhere.

Scene 8

Burning Shelter **Karuvaki, Aira**

Karuvaki struggles through fires and falling structures to reach the shelter of Aira. She finds the boy standing alone inside a room engulfed in fire.

Karuvaki "Aira, my dear ! Are you still here in this crucible of death ? Come with me."

She embraces the boy.

Aira "I shall wait for the enemy to fight and die. Or, shall like to be devoured by the flames."

Karuvaki lifts the boy forcibly and runs out through flames towards a back door of the Fort.

Scene 9

Night: Tent **7 Kalingan Chiefs, Mauryan Generals**

Inside an army tent outside the battle field, three top generals of Asoka talk to the captured Kalinga Chiefs, guarded by armed soldiers holding torches and spears.

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Mauryan General "The battle is over, nay, the war ! Toshali has fallen to dust. You are taken as prisoners".

1st Kalinga Chief "We do not acknowledge defeat. For us the war is not over. Our soliders from the colonies will soon arrive to destroy your forces. Go and tell your king that fall of Toshali is not the fall of Kalinga. He may wait to see his own fall."

Mauryan General "Are you unaware of what awaits you now ! Do you not see what Fate has stored for you?"

2nd Kalinga Chief "Fate has stored for us and our people a deathless glory. We shall die without knowing defeat. We are ready for your swords."

Mauryan generals look towards each other.

Mauryan General "Soliders ! Keep old men in safe custody."

Scene 10

Night:Asoka's Tent **Asoka, Generals**

Victorious Asoka, after the fall of Toshali, is sitting on his throne inside the tent on Dhauli. The first quarter of the night is about to pass by. His three generals appear before him to inform about the Kalingan Chiefs who refused to acknowledge defeat.

Asoka "They say, they do not admit defeat ! It means, they need a further demonstration of my wrath. Capture as many soldiers of Kalinga as possible as the prisoners of war. Assemble them at the foot of Dhauli when the sun rises. Bring the seven Chiefs to witness the massacre of their soliders. Then and then only that these stubborn Chiefs will realise what is a defeat. I shall reduce Kalinga to a graveyard so that the echo of my victory will resound in the silence of death."

The generals bow down and depart.

Scene 11

Karuvaki' House **Karuvaki, Aira**

Karuvaki, assisted by two Kalingan guards, brings Aira back to her house. Aira exhibits uncontrolled emotion.

Aira "Should I be confined to my room when our soldiers are groaning on the field with death agonies and crying for a drop of water ? Allow me to go to them and see them breahing their last. I can swear over their blood and bodies that some day Kalinga will avenge this defeat. Let these men die with a solace in their mind."

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Karuvaki "You cannot see your own eyes the ghastly scenes of death. You are too young for the sight of a battle field !"

Aira "Let me then run to the top of Dhauli to kill Chandasoka who might be sleeping in peace after his victory !"

Karuvaki "Dear Aira ! Control yourself at this moment of grief. When you become the King of Kalinga, you can take up your sword against the foe, not now. His soliders are drunken with joy. They can find you anywhere near Dhauli."

From the other side of the wall, Karuvaki hears frantic but faint voice of Yasas. As she goes out of the room, Aira runs out into darkness, shouting "I am going to the bank of Daya to see my men."

Scene 12

Yasas's Room **Yasas, Karuvaki**

As Karuvaki enters into the room of Yasas, she finds him in a posture of crawling in a most painful manner.

Yasas "I shall go like this to the top of Dhauli to breathe my last before Asoka. If I can utter a few words before I die, my soul will depart in peace. Karuvaki, do not stop me from going to the Chandasoka when he might be feeling the happiest at the cost of human miseries at the worst!"

Karuvaki "I feel helpless, Yasas, I am helpless ! Aira has fled to the bank of Daya. You want to reach Dhauli ! Well, I shall carry you that far and leave you at the foot of the hill, and run to find my Aira. May God keep you alive till you find your victorious friend !"

She claps and three sturdy Kalingan women come in.

Karuvaki "Place him on a stretcher and follow me. Let God see through the darkness of this fateful night what His sons and daughters are doing on earth !"

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Episode Thirty-Six

Commentary: The nightly hours that followed the fall of Toshali carry for the conqueror a mysterious call from within himself to see the battle field where he won the victory. The flickering lamps from hundred corners, the songs of solace from thousand lips, coupled with the sounds of death from myriad throats, evoke a feeling in the heart of Asoka to visit the arena of his last great battles.

Scene 1

Asoka's Tent:Interior **Asoka**

As the time runs to midnight, a sleepless Asoka walks up and down inside his tent, submerged in deep thought. Sounds of agonies reach his ears from far distances as well as the serene hymns of the monks and nuns. He stops walking and stands motionless for a few moments. Abruptly, thereafter, he covers his body with a heavy dark gown and puts on his head a black apron. He comes out of the tent after putting off the lamps inside.

Scene 2

Hill Slope **Asoka, Guards**

Asoka steps down the hill slope in a hurry. The guards on either side of the path bow their heads as they see their Emperor passing by.

Asoka reaches the last step at the foot of the hill and walks into darkness in quick steps. He looks up to see the half-moon on the sky moves ahead towards the battle field like a phantom-figure.

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Scene 3

Night : Battle Field of Daya

Standing on a mound of earth, Asoka observes vast extents of the battle field under the light of a pale moon.

He comes down and walks forward. His long sword is hanging down his waist beneath the dark cloak. As he walks, he pauses for a while at a spot where a Magadhan general is lying in a pool of blood with both his arms missing. He is muttering the words - 'water, water' - while expressing deep pain in face. A Magadhan soldier with a spear in hand bends over the body of the general. The latter recognises him from his uniform.

General "My Magadhan brother ! Have we won the victory ?"

Soldier "Yes, we have won. With this good news, you can now go to heaven to celebrate victory. Before the Kalingans despatch you to your new abode, I shall do that work for sake of our honour."

The soldier pierces his spear to the chest of the general.

General "Oh, you brute !"

Soldier "On this day, every Magadhan is a brute !"

Asoka observes the gruesome act of his soldier and passes by.

Scene 4

At another place, a Kalingan soldier is lying under the wheel of a heavy chariot with his body almost cut to halves. Several little boys are struggling their utmost to lift the wheel. When they succeed at last, they find the soldier still breathing. They sprinkle water on his eyes. They are trying to carry his body away while talking to each other.

1st Boy "The Magadhans are killing their own dying friends. They say, the wounded are of no use. Is it not a sin to do so ?"

2nd Boy "They must be working under the direction of their King. And that King is the worst sinner on earth. Some day his sins will rebound on him."

Asoka moves away from the place.

Scene 5

A dying general of Kalinga is struggling against death with deep wounds on his body. His grief-stricken young wife is shedding profuse tears while trying to nurse his wounds. The general regains consciousness and looks the face of his beloved.

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General (*faint voice*) "Why did you come so far to see my death ?"

Wife "Only to go to the other world with you. Death cannot separate you from me."

With much difficulty the general raises his hand towards the face of his wife, but the hand sinks to the ground as he dies, His wife takes out a dagger from her husband's waist, and stabs herself to death lying on her husband's chest. Asoka looks towards the dead couple and moves away.

Scene 6

A monk is trying to take out an arrow from the body of a gasping soldier. His eyes fall on the passing shadow of Asoka.

Monk "Oh, you passerby ! Kindly come to my help to pull out this arrow. He may be a Magadhan or a Kalingan, but he has still life in him. Please come dear brother for this work of God."

Heedless of the call, Asoka moves away.

Monk "Oh, you man ! Have you no life in you ? Have you no heart of a human being ?"

He struggles himself and pulls out the arrow.

Scene 7

Three young girls of tender age are weeping bitterly over the body of their wounded father who is being attended upon by Sanghamitra. A nun is holding an earthen lamp over the body of the sufferer. From a little distance, Asoka recognises the face of his own daughter and halts his steps.

The dying hero opens his eyes and looks towards his little daughters. As the daughters bend over his face, he places his trembling hand over their heads by way of blessing. Next he looks at Sanghamitra. In moments his head sinks over a bloody patch as he breathes his last. The little girls burst into weeping. Sanghamitra embraces them with their faces held tightly over her bosom.

Sanghamitra "Dear little ones ! You cannot get back your father by weeping over his death. Instead, let us pray for the peace of his soul in Heaven. Stop weeping and come with me."

She wipes out tear from their eyes as they look towards her face of grace.

Eldest Girl "Nun ! Is your father alive ?"

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Sanghamitra "Yes, he is."

Girl "Does he love you dearly as our father loved us ?"

Sanghamitra "Every father loves his daughter dearly. So does my father !"

Girl "No, sister, no. We heard from our father that Chandasoka has no love for anyone, not even for his son and daughter. He drove out them from his palace. Is he a mad man?"

Sanghamitra "No, dear. He is not mad. I do not know if he drove out his daughter. May be, his daughter left the palace to join the Buddhist sangha on her own will. I can assure you, all fathers have love for their children."

Girl "Nun ! We are unfortunate. We have lost our dear father. When you see your father, tell him about us. He may give us his affection from his home."

Asoka looks towards the faces of the little girls and moves away in quick steps. From a distance Asoka turns his eyes back towards the same spot. He finds Sanghamitra and the little weeping girls carrying the dead body towards the funeral pyre at the river ghat for mass cremation. Asoka hastens away.

Scene 8

Hundreds of weeping and wailing women, eldrely and young, are searching through the dead bodies their own dead dear ones. Some of them have small lamps in hand. Asoka is passing by. His lengthening shadow falls over the dead bodies from a distance. An old woman finds him under a dark cloak walking swiftly like ghost. She cries out in fear.

Old Woman "Look, the God of Death, Yama, is walking through the battle field. His shadow is falling over the dead !"

Another Woman "He is collecting the souls of the departed."

The women run away in fear. Asoka hurries away.

Scene 9

In faint moonlight, Asoka's eyes suddenly catch the face of Vidisha Devi, sitting in the midst of a group of young widows who have lost their husbands in battle. The dead bodies of their husbands are seen at a little distance, lying in rows one after the other. Devi is giving consolation to the bereaved ladies who are in tears. Asoka pauses at a distance. His eyes are fixed on the face of Devi.

Devi "Dear sisters ! Your husbands have died for a noble cause while defending their country from invasion. Those who die for the country, shall live. Those who have killed them shall also die one day. I beseech, you

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give up your sorrow in the consolation that the soul has no death. Their memory be your proud possession.''

A woman — ''Sister ! How can we bear the separation from our beloved husbands ?''

Devi — ''Look, I as a nun bear the separation from my husband who is alive. It pains me, it breaks my heart, but I suffer the separation as sadly as you have to suffer it from now on. We have to suffer our *karma* since we have no escape from it.''

2nd Woman — ''Sister ! We are proud of our husbands who died as heroes. With that we can have no peace in living. Will you admit us to your Sangha as nuns so that we may live in peace like you while serving others ?''

Devi — ''The Buddha has shown you the light in this darkest moment of your life. You are most welcome to our fold as our sisters. May you begin a new phase of life to prepare for salvation !''

The widows get up. Each one of them carries the dead body of her husband and walks slowly towards the burning ghat. Asoka turns his face and goes away.

Scene 10

At a solitary place, a group of badly wounded Magadhans are struggling to crawl over muddy earth to reach at a safer place in desperate hope to live. One of them is trying to stretch at a small pool of blood to quench his thirst. As he manages to take a palmful of muddy blood, his nearest comrade laughs at him in a frenzied manner.

Frenzied Magadhan — ''Yes, my friend, drink the human blood thinking it as heavenly wine when our comrades near the King are celebrating their victory over the enemy !''

Dying Magadhan — ''It is the King's victory, dear comrade, not of your's or mine !''

He crawls into the bloody pool and sinks his head to die. Asoka passes by. At a distance he finds jackals tearing up human bodies to enjoy their feast.

Scene 11

Monks are removing the dead bodies of the Magadhan soldiers to the burning ghat. One of them requests the Kalingans to help them to carry the dead. The Kalingans who are carrying the bodies of their countrymen look at the monks with anger.

Monk — ''Friends ! Won't you help us to lift these dead Magadhans for cremation ?''

Kalingan — ''Have you lost your sense ? Do you want us to desecrate our hands by

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Asoka Observes the Elephant Forces of Kalinga on the other side of the River

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Battle Scene on the Bank of River Daya

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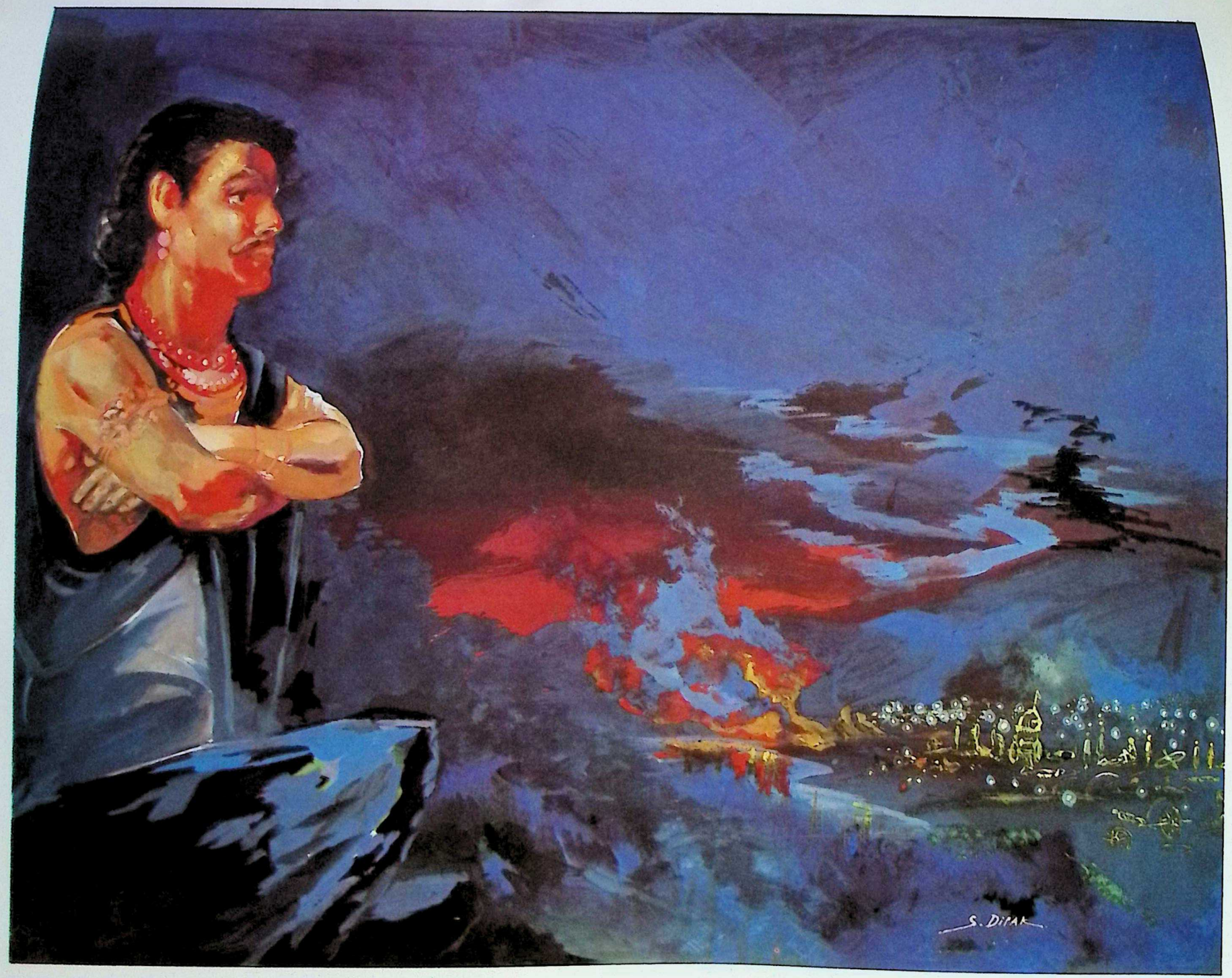

From the Top of the Dhauli Hill Asoka Observes the Battlefield of Ḋaya in the Night

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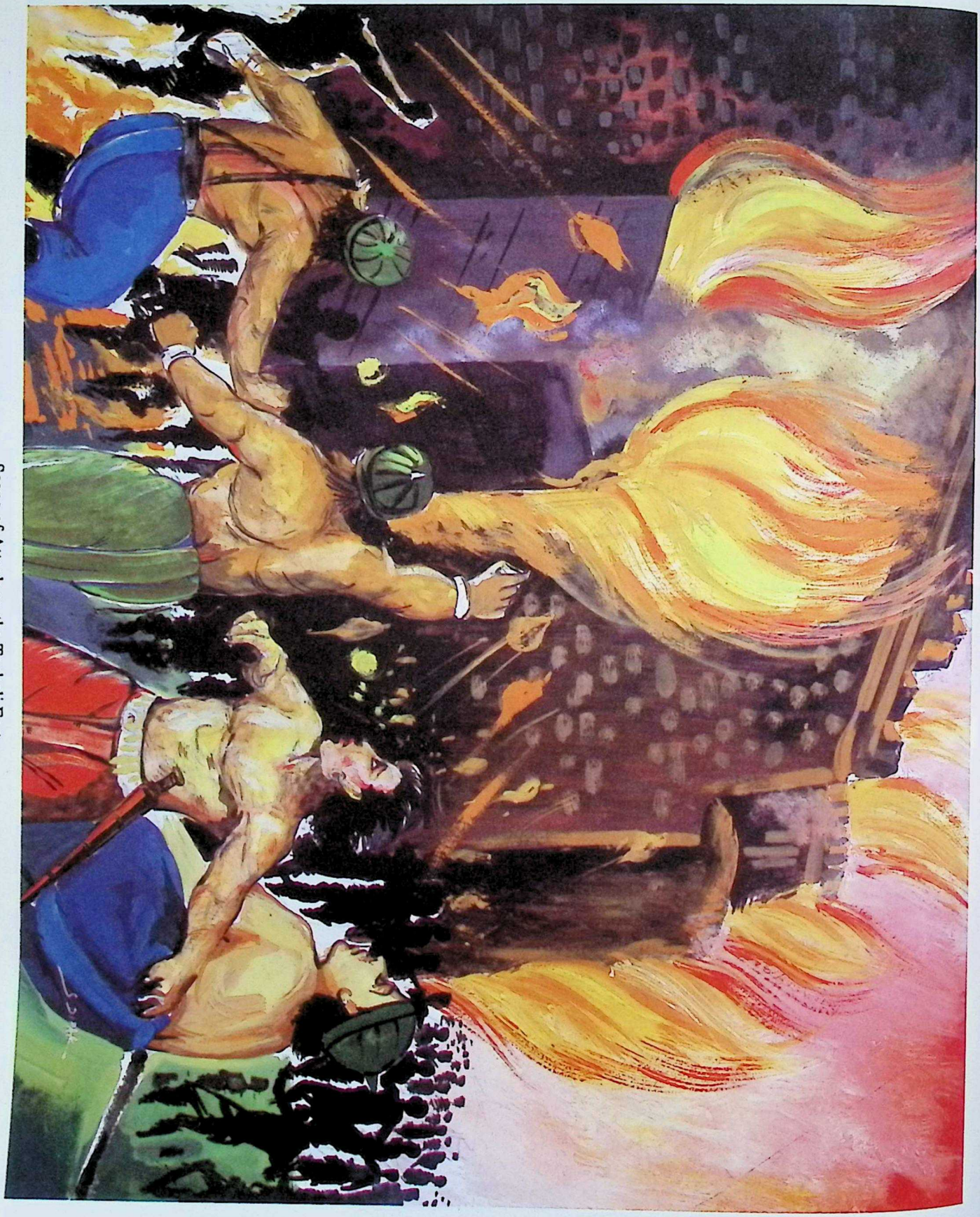

Scene of Attack on the Toshali Fort

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Asoka in Disguise Moves Through the Battlefield in Night. A Magadhan General with Missing Hands is being Killed by a Magadhan Soldier

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Asoka Observes: Kalinga Boys Trying to Lift a Wheel from a Dying Soldier's Breast

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Asoka Observes: A Young Wife Stabs Herself to Death on the Breast of Her Dead Husband

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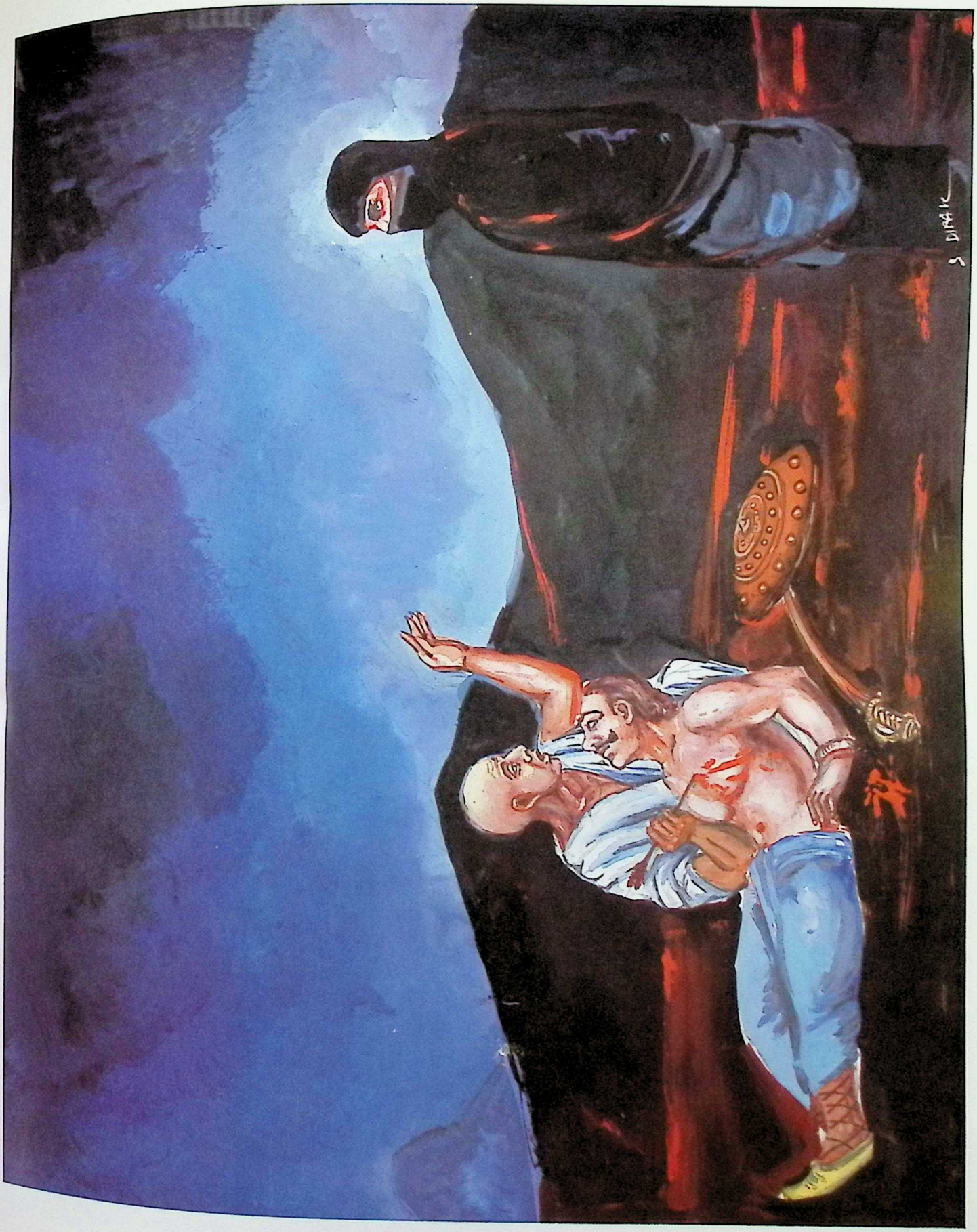

Asoka Observes: A Buddhist Monk Trying to Pull out an Arrow From a Dying Soldier's Body

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Asoka Observes: Devi Consoling Young Widows Weeping Near the Deadbodies of their Husbands

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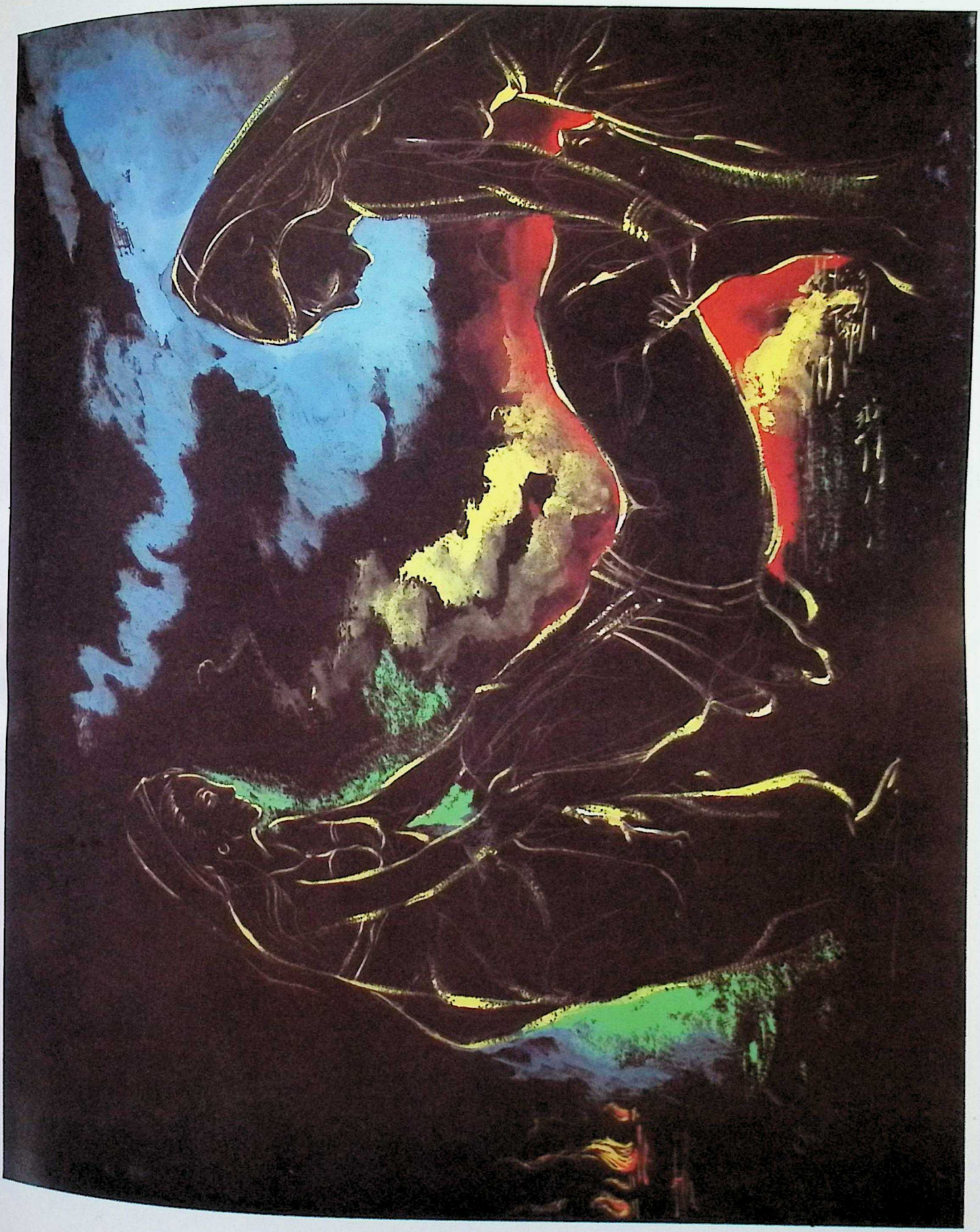

Asoka Observes: Rows of Funeral Pyres on the Bank of River Daya

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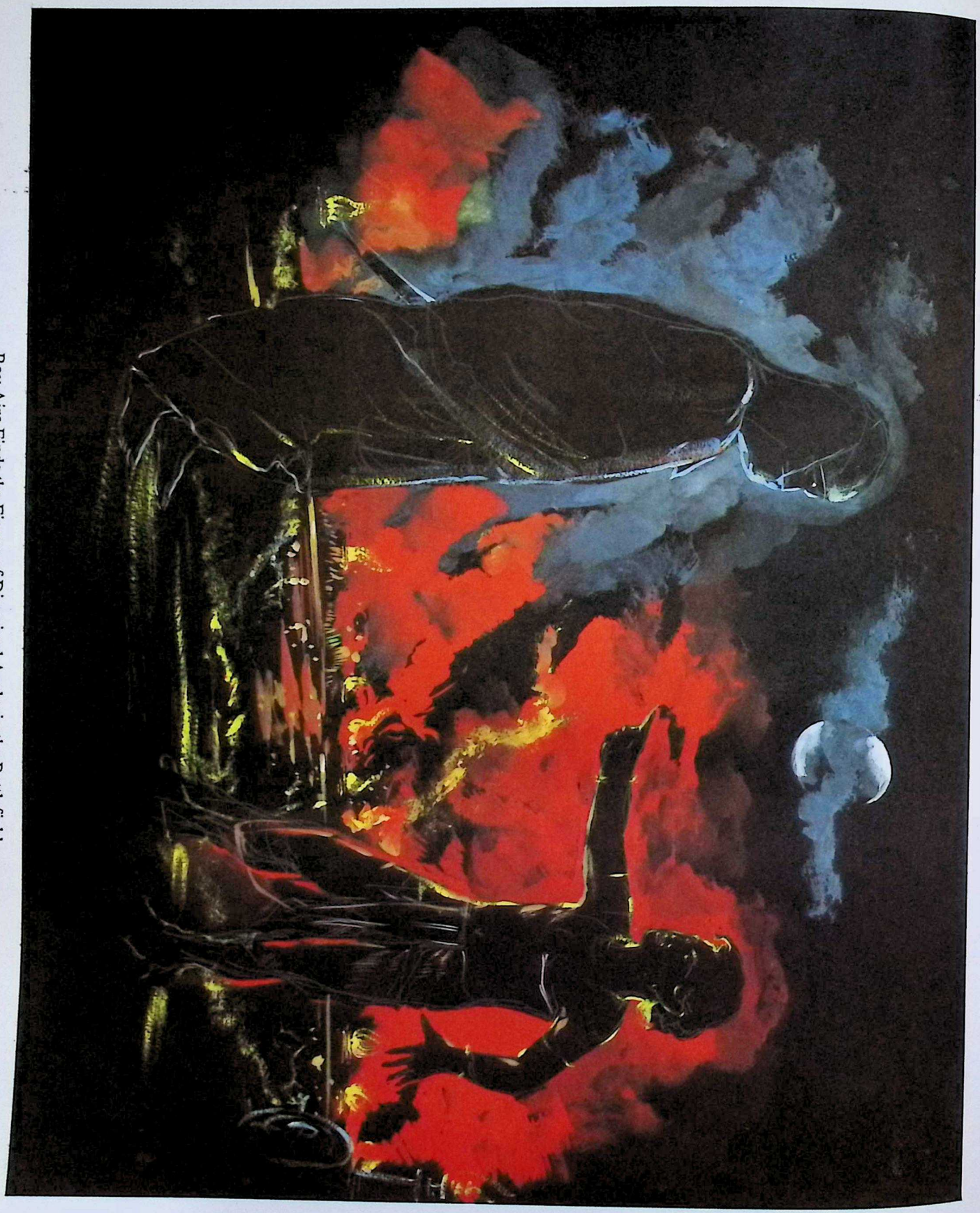

Boy Aira Finds the Figure of Disguised Asoka in the Battlefield

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touching the bodies of our enemies ? Go and ask the living Magadhans to burn their dead. Go and ask their King to do his duty towards the dead !''

Monk

''Brothers ! Who is who after death ? All bodies will merg with the same Panchbhuta — kshiti, ab, teja, marut, byom — from which they came. When reduced to ashes, can you distinguish a Magadhan from a Kalingan ? The King's body, too, will merge with the five elements when his soul departs. On the holy cremation ground all are the same. It is the only place which knows no caste or creed, race or colour, king or pauper !''

An old Kalingan nods his head giving assent to the monk's request. He looks to his fellow countrymen.

Old Kalingan

''What the monk says is correct. let us forget that the dead are our enemies. Our own earth and air will turn impure if these thousands of enemy bodies are not reduced to ashes. As the monk says his words of wisdom, some day King Asoka and his living soldiers of today will also die and their mortal frames will turn to ashes. Let us obey the monk.''

The Kalingans join hand with the monks to lift the bodies of the dead Magadhans. Asoka observes the scene and walks away. At a distance, he finds Sannyasi Upagupta sprinkling holy water and chanting hymns over the dead.

Scene 12

Bank of Daya

The night enters into its fourth quarter. At a distance from the river ghat, Asoka stands and observes the mass cremation of the dead Kalingans. The rows of pyres are surrounded by men, women and children. People heap piles of wood on every pyre as the Brahman priests pour ghee and chant the sacred funeral hymns.

Crowds place the dead bodies in heaps. In one pyre is placed the body of the Kalinga's Commander-in-Chief as the people pay their last homage by sheding tears. Soon rise the flames to sky from pyre after pyre.

In dramatic suddenness, the wife of the Commander-in-Chief jumps into her husband's funeral platform. So, too, jump to the pyres other women at other places. The crowds wail and lament as the flames rise high up.

Crowd

''May Heaven provide shelter to the souls of our heroes ! May the Gods shower curses on Chandasoka ! May his soul suffer eternal torment in Hell !''

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Asoka observes the scene and hears the words of the crowd. He turns back and walks away followed by a boy who comes out of the burning ghat.

Scene 13

The glowing flames of fire from many funeral pyres lighten up the river bank to some distances. As Asoka is hastening away, the boy Aira finds him in his strange form and suspecting him as a Magadhan enemy, runs behind him. At a place, he appears before the shadowy figure of Asoka and obstructs his path.

Aira "Why have you kept your body and face under cover ? Are you afraid to show your face to others like a thief of a criminal ? Are you an agent of Chandasoka ? Did he send you to see the cremation of the Kalingan enemies ? Had you not covered your face like a coward, I should have picked up a sword to challenge you !"

Asoka goes ahead in strides. Aira shouts from behind.

Aira "Go to Chandasoka to say that the boy Aira of Kalinga has taken a vow at the cremation ground to avenge Magadh in due time. When I grow up to become the King of Kalinga, I shall do to Pataliputra what Chandasoka has done to Toshali. If I die before I do it, my decree will run for my successors to humble Magadh and bring back the Image of Jina to this sacred land."

Asoka vanishes into darkness.

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Episode Thirty-Seven

Commentary: Asoka comes back from the battle field with a deep sense of remorse. Yet, he faces the problem of dealing with an undaunted race of people who would not acknowledge defeat even after the fall of Toshali.

Scene 1

Foot of Dhauli **Karuvaki, Yasas**

During the last quarter of that awful night, some Kalinga women carry Yasas on a stretcher to the foot of the Dhauli Hill. Karuvaki takes charge of him. She proceeds towards the guards on the steps and faces them.

Karuvaki "Soldiers ! The man on the stretcher is a trusted friend of your Emperor. He wants to see him before breathing his last. Please go inside the tent and inform your master that the name of the dying man outside is Yasas."

The guards stand motionless and deaf. They do not look at Karuvaki.

Karuvaki "The Emperor will reward you for this information. There is no moment to be lost. He is about to die. There is an urgent message for your King."

The guards stay as stony as before. As Karuvaki lifts her foot to climb the next step, the guards raise their spears to prevent her from going. She comes back to Yasas.

Karuvaki "These human stones will not understand, will not hear, will not move."

Yasas "I shall shout from here at the top of my voice so that the Emperor may hear my call."

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Karuvaki "If you do it, these people will cut your throat. We may wait here till the morning."

She sits down near Yasas on the ground.

Scene 2

Same Place **Asoka, Karuvaki, Yasas**

As the night advances towards its last hours, Asoka is seen approaching Dhauli to reach his tent. When he appears at the first step, Karuvaki finds his phantom-like figure in her front.

Karuvaki "You have appeared before us like a man of God ! You seem to be going towards the tent of the King. When you see him, be merciful enough to inform him that his friend named Yasas is waiting here to pay his last respects to the Emperor before death. He may pass away any moment."

Asoka halts and looks at the lying figure on earth. In stunned surprise he recognises the face of Yasas. In moments, he uncovers his face. Yasas recognises Asoka and mutters some faint words.

Yasas "Now I can die in peace after seeing you on the ruins of Toshali !"

Asoka waves his hand. Guards come near.

Asoka (*to guards*) "Carry the stretcher to my tent."

Asoka climbs step after step. Karuvaki follows him. Yasas is carried towards the tent by the guards.

Scene 3

Tent: Interior **Asoka, Yasas, Karuvaki**

Inside the tent, a sad and thoughtful Asoka is sitting on his throne. On a spacious couch is lying Yasas. Karuvaki is standing by his side. Bright lamps burn inside.

Yasas "Emperor ! While sending me on this mission to Kalinga, you expressed your desire to see me on the ruins of Toshali. So have I come to greet you on your victory and take leave of you to die in the home of this noble girl, my sister Karuvaki. Allow me to go before the day of your victory dawns on Toshali."

Asoka "All my wealth will not be the worth of your life. I shall not allow you to die."

Yasas "Emperor ! Yasas has seen enough of life ! He has no desire to see it more."

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Asoka "Yasas ! I shall do everything in my power to bring you back to your former self. I shall not allow you to leave me."

Yasas "I have lost my former self for ever. If I do not die, let me live a new life under the care of an angel like Karuvaki who has restored my real self in me."

Yasas sobs. Asoka looks at Karuvaki. She does not show any sigh of fear or respect, anger or anxiety.

Asoka "Karuvaki ! You have saved the life of my dearest friend. I want to reward you for your services. Would you leave Yasas and go back to your home ? My maids and physicians will look after him."

Karuvaki removes her apron from her face and looks straight to the eyes of Asoka fearlessly.

Karuvaki "What reward can I take from a King for saving the life of his friend when the King has caused death to countless of my friends as well as to his other numberless friends/like Yasas? The only reward the King can give me is his permission to nurse the Magadhans who are still struggling for life on the bank of Daya ! As for Yasas, it is up to him to stay with his King or to go back with me."

Asoka expresses surprise and pain to hear Karuvaki's words.

Asoka "Can I not offer you any reward just as a man, if not as a king?"

Karuvaki "If you want to do me favour either as a king or a man, may I be permitted to ask a few questions to the man in the King?"

Asoka remains silent. Karuvaki speaks.

Karuvaki "Can a man takes away thousands of lives give back life to a single man?"

Asoka "Karuvaki ! Do you think it possible for any man to give back life to dead man ? If it is not, how do you expect a king to do it when he kills his enemies to win a victory ?"

Karuvaki "May I ask the victorious King what has he gained from his great victory ?"

Asoka "By my victory, I have conquered the country of Kalinga !"

Karuvaki "May I say that the King is wrong in his thought. The King has gained a victory. But he has not conquered a country. Because, a country means its people at any given time. May I say that King Asoka has not conquered the heart of a single man or woman or child of Kalinga!"

Asoka looks in surprise. Karuvaki wants to continue, but Yasas intervenes.

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Yasas "Sister ! It is no use talking such things to a king. His path is different from your path. Let us take leave of the conqueror and go our own way."

Asoka (*softly*) "Yasas !"

Yasas "Emperor ! My decision is final. My path now is different from your path. I have tasted the milk and honey on my new path as shown to me by Karuvaki. I have abandoned the path you showed to me."

Asoka gets up and looks to Karuvaki with appealing eyes. Karuvaki looks to Yasas.

Karuvaki "Brother Yasas ! Do not cause pain to one who likes you so much. For a day at least you can stay in his shelter. Dawn is about to descend. It is late for me to take you to my place. I promise, I shall come back next night to take you back."

She goes out abruptly without looking towards Asoka or paying him parting regards.

Scene 4

River Daya

As the first glow of the dawn came down upon the water of Daya, countless dead bodies were seen floating downward the stream. From the river bank still came heavy smokes from numerous pyres. Heaps of dead bodies were yet lying here and there as far as the eyes could see. Swarms of vultures began to descend on the battle field from different corners of the sky.

Scene 5

Thousands of screaming and wailing Kalingan women are seen running towards the Dhauli Hill to offer abuses to the victorious Chandasoka. They defy the Magadhan soldiers as they run wildly towards the Hill from all sides. The Magadhans are dragging the bodies of their dead comrades towards the river to throw them in the water before the daybreak.

Around the ruins of Toshali Fort, the Magadhan soliders are rounding up their prisoners of war to carry them to the foot of Dhauli.

The prisoners raise slogans against Chandasoka and shout out their decision not to surrender or to admit defeat. They are chained and dragged by force while offering desperate resistance.

Twilight yields place to dawn. Daylight rises to sky to lighten up the ghastly earth around Dhauli and Daya.

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Episode Thirty-Eight

Commentary: A troubled conscience overtakes Asoka's mind. As the Kalinga prisoners do not admit defeat, he orders to carry them away as captives from Toshali to Pataliputra. Asoka works like a helpless victim to his own actions. The great march of the Kalinga prisoners, numbering one hundred and fifty thousand, begins at the culmination of the Kalinga War.

Scene 1

Dhauli Hill **Prisoners, Kalinga Chiefs, Magadhan Soldiers**

Kalinga prisoners numbering one lakh and fifty thousand and their captured Ruling Chiefs and generals are seen arrayed in rows over endless stretches of land extending eastward from the foot of the Dhauli Hill. Mauryan archers on hourseback are seen all around the area encircling the prisoners. Soliders with naked swords and spears stand on either side of each row.

Sun is rising on the eastern horizon.

Scene 2

At A Distance

Countless men, women and children are gathered outside the encircled space to see the fate of the prisoners. They cry and shout aloud. They weep and wail. They hurl curses at the enemy.

Scene 3

Foot of Dhauli **Asoka, Others**

Asoka emerges from his tent to the blowing of trumpets and

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beating of drums. In the rays of the morning sun his face looks red, but also sad and pale. He climbs down the steps to reach an elevated platform facing his generals as well as the lines of prisoners.

From a distance frenzied people curse him with abusive words as he climbs to the platform. Deafening noises reach his ears. He hears the words from thousand throats "Hell to Chandasoka." "Curse to Chandasoka", "Death to the Killer".

Scene 4

Platform **Asoka, Others**

From the platform Asoka looks to his generals who salute the Emperor. They wait for his orders.

Asoka "Have the Kalinga leaders agreed to acknowledge defeat ? Have they agreed to surrender and submit ?"

Generals stand silent. Asoka turns his eyes towards the Kalinga leaders who are in chains.

Asoka "Kalingan leaders ! Do you admit defeat so that I may bestow my mercy on you and your countrymen ?"

Kalinga Leader "We scornfully reject your offer of mercy. On the other hand, we are ready to offer our mercy to you if you vacate our land forthwith before our army reaches the shores of Kalinga from our colonies ! We promise, our soliders will not attack you as you flee from this country."

Asoka looks terrible and turns to his generals.

Asoka "Generals ! Carry these obstinate old fellows to Pataliputra, nay, to Girika's Hell."

Soldiers remove the leaders from their position and whisk them away. Asoka now turns his face towards the Kalinga generals.

Asoka "Kalinga Generals ! Your leaders have lost their mind not to acknowledge defeat. Are you ready to submit by admitting defeat ?"

Kalingan Generals "King of Magadh ! Do you still hope that the generals and soldiers of Kalinga will submit to you ? Why did they then die in thousands, nay, in hundreds of thousands ? We stand here unconquered and undefeated. We are ready for death to defy defeat."

Asoka's face turns red. He thunders at his generals.

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Asoka — "Generals ! Carry all these one lakh and fifty thousand Kalingan soldiers as prisoners to Pataliputra - Girika's Hell."

The generals express great surprise to receive the Emperor's order, but give their assent by saluting Asoka. Asoka comes down from the platform and walks towards his tent. Deafening shouts from the Kalingan women and children resound around Dhauli. They shower praise on their doomed countrymen and curse on the enemy.

Kalingan Women — "Glory to our heroes ! Go to death without defeat ! Death to Chandasoka ! Shame to Magadh ! May Kalinga shine in immortal glory."

Magadhan horsemen attack the crowds to drive them away.

Scene 5

Karuvaki's House — **Karuvaki, Aira**

Boy Aira is sitting in silence with a sullen face. Karuvaki comes in.

Karuvaki — "Aira ! Chandasoka has ordered his men to take away all our prisoners to Magadh."

Aira (*agitated*) — "You had taken Yasas to his tent last night. If I were you, I would have stabbed that monster in his own tent."

Karuvaki — "I pitied that man. He had no answers to my questions !"

Aira — "Did that other monster, Yasas, fall at his master's feet ?"

Karuvaki — "No. He too opened his mind before his master. He has called us as his saviour. I have given him my word to bring him back this night."

Aira — "What use he will be to you ?"

Karuvaki — "He is a changed man. He will work for the Sangha if he survives."

Aira — "I doubt if he is different from what he was. A devil does not turn into a saint."

Karuvaki — "Who knows ! Even the worst of the human beings like Asoka can change if only correctly advised and guided !"

Aira smiles with the simplicity of a child.

Aira — "What do you say ! Asoka may change ! Even Buddha cannot change an Asoka. He is taking away our countless countrymen to his Hell. His thirst for blood will never be quenched ! Allow me at the moment to go and see my dear countrymen for the last time. They will never see their dear Kalinga again."

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Aira weeps and runs away unexpectedly.

Scene 6

A Tent Near Asoka's Tent **Yasas, Buddhist Monk, Asoka**

Yasas is lying on bed inside a tent adjacent to Asoka's tent. Maids are nursing his wounds. A Buddhist Monk is brought in by a soldier. The monk observes Yasas's body and sits down to apply balm to his cuts.

Yasas "Sannyasi ! If you want me to live, the only medicine I need is a word from Sannyasi Upagupta that he will mercifully admit this sinner to his holy order."

Monk (*surprised*) "Will your Emperor permit you to join the Sangha ?"

Yasas "Asoka is no more my emperor ! Instead, I have an Empress to whom I long to go back if I live !"

Monk "Empress !"

Yasas "Yes, my Empress. She is Vidisha Mahadevi Sakya Kumari."

Monk "Dear Friend ! She is also here with Sannyasi Upagupta. Also are here Mahindra and Sanghamitra ! How fortunate you are if you happen to know them."

The eyes of Yasas glow up.

Yasas "Dear Healer ! You have healed my wounds with your words. Do me mercy by taking me to their presence. Save me from this valley of death, by taking me to the abode of the angles."

Sounds of trumpets announce the coming of the Emperor. Asoka enters.

Asoka (*to the monk*) "Is my friend well ? Do all your best to bring him back his former body and health."

Yasas "The healer may cure the wounds of my body. But I am waiting for the real healer to heal the wounds of my heart and soul."

He abruptly turns his face away from Asoka. Feeling disturbed in thought, Asoka goes out with a sorrowful face.

Scene 7

Night : Asoka's Tent **Asoka, Karuvaki, Yasas**

Asoka is sitting silent on a throne, on a couch nearby is sleeping Yasas. A guard brings in Karuvaki. She does not look at Asoka,

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but speaks to Yasas, not knowing that he is fast asleep under medicine.

Karuvaki "Brother Yasas ! I have kept my word and have come to take you with me."

Asoka (*in soft words*) "I shall not leave him behind in your country."

Karuvaki looks at Asoka.

Karuvaki "Conqueror ! Why do you call it my country ! You have conquered it. It is now your country. It is also the country of your friend."

Asoka "Unless your people admit that it is the country of the conqueror, I shall not regard this country as mine. I shall wait for the day when they have to say that Asoka has conquered Kalinga."

Karuvaki "They may never say so. You have conquered their bodies only, not their mind ! Conqueror ! Conquest by sword is no conquest, the real conquest is the conquest of heart. Please try it if you can. Your friend may stay with you. Try to conquer his heart too as he is now a rebel. If you can win him over, you may learn how to win over your enemies.

Karuvaki turns her back to go out. Asoka calls her by name, and she stops.

Asoka "Karuvaki ! I shall think over what you say. Leave Yasas with me. He is too unwell. You may not see him again. But he will remember you for ever. By the way, may I know who you are !"

Karuvaki "What use knowing who am I ! But since you have asked it, let me answer : I am the daughter of a fisherman of Kalinga. You came to kill my countrymen while I saved the life of your trusted man. It is for you to think over if it makes any difference between saving life and taking life. I wish your friend's early recovery. I take leave of him."

Karuvaki goes out without wishing regards to Asoka. Asoka looks on with dull eyes of wonder.

Scene 8

Night: Small Tent **Basavadatta, Girls, 2 Generals**

Inside a small tent are seen Basavadatta and other dancing girls in a joyous and playful mood, enjoying the prospects of homeward journey at the end of the battles. They are singing their songs of pleasure.

At the end of their songs, the girls go out of the tent leaving Basavadatta alone to retire. Basavadatta is about to close the doors when a general enters.

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General "Darling ! You have entertained us enough during our most anxious nights before the battles. Now that the war is over I have come to spend the night with you to celebrate victory."

Basavadatta "I am tired. Please leave me alone. You will get my love in Pataliputra."

General (*drinking wine*) "Leave you alone ! Dear beauty ! Such a night seldom comes. I have escaped unhurt through terrifying battles. Tomorrow begins the ordeal of a long journey. I cannot miss the night to make the best use of it with you."

He embraces Basavadatta like a brute in passion. Basavadatta tries to resist. The drunken general loses his temper and goes on beating Basavadatta who falls down from her bed, crying out with injury. The general leaves the tent hurriedly to escape detection when he hears the footsteps outside. Another general comes in , also in a drunken state. He looks violent to see another general slipping out Basavadatta's room in darkness.

2nd General "You wretched woman ! You have always pretended love to me. But, you are in love with someone else ! I shall not spare you !"

Out of self-control under heavy intoxication, the general behaves like a beast and molests Basavadatta. As she struggles hard to come out of his clutch, he causes deep wounds on her face with a dagger, and departs.

Scene 9

Highway **Prisoners, Soldiers**

The Magadhan army is on its long return march from Toshali towards Pataliputra. Behind the regiments of cavalry and infantry are seen unending lines of Kalinga prisoners, all in chains, and guarded by armed Magadhans on either side. Looking miserable and wretched, the prisoners try to walk faster, forgetful of their wounds and starving condition. Some of them begin to sing a martial song of their race and are soon joined by others.

Scene 10

Far behind the retreating army and the hordes of prisoners, runs a chariot carrying Asoka alone. He looks crest-fallen, dejected and thoughtful. He turns his dry eyes to either side of the highway. Devasted villages, destroyed towns and ruined temples and houses present shocking sights to Asoka. Swarms of vultures are still enjoying their feasts on dead man and animals. Desolated countrysides look horrifying like haunted places. The chariot drives on.

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Scene 11

Far behind Asoka's chariot are moving slowly some bullock-carts carrying the Buddhist monks and nuns. In one of the carts are sitting Sannyasi Upagupta, Vidisha Devi, Mahindra and Sanghamitra. Still behind the carts are walking fast hundreds of monks and nuns with a determination to come near the walking prisoners to look after them. With them are seen Karuvaki and a number of Kalinga nuns and monks with carts loaded with food, water, medicines and other ncesssities for the prisoners.

The endless humanity moves on towards endless distances as darkness descends on earth.

Scene 12

Night: Open Ground **Prisoners, Monks, Nuns, Karuvaki**

The prisoners are kept at a roadside place on an open ground to rest for the night. Karuvaki with monks and nuns, with lamps in hand, moves about from prisoner to prisoner to look after their needs. They are provided with food, candy and water. Healing balms are applied to their wounds.

Monks and nuns chant their hymns of prayer. Karuvaki leads them in their song. The prisoners to join chorus.

The darkness deepens as the night advances. Silence reigns over the place as the stars reign in the sky.

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Episode Thirty-Nine

Commentary: Asoka returns from Kalinga after having won a war but having lost a victory. In that moment of mental distress, a new hope dawns on his inner self amidst torrents of shaking events.

Scene 1

Bodh Gaya Monastery **Sumana, Nigrodha (Age 9)**

In a small monastery at Bodh Gaya, near the Bodhi Tree, lives Princess Sumana, the widow of the late Prince Susima, as a Buddhist nun. She is seen offering prayers in front of the Bodhi Tree under which Gautama Buddha attained Englightenment. Her nine-year old son Nigrodha runs to her with considerable excitement.

Nigrodha — "Maa ! Today my uncle Asoka will pass by this forest-road on his return march from Kalinga with thousands of prisoners. I have not seen him till now. This is a golden opportunity for me to see him today. Let me go to the highway passing through the forests of Uruvillva."

Sumana — "Nigrodha ! Why should you go to see him ! He killed your father to usurp the throne. Ever since your birth, his men are in search of you. Asoka thinks that you, as Susima's son, are his only rival to the throne. He wants to destroy you. I am living in this monastery as a nun where nobody knows who I am, and nobody knows who you are, except you and your mother. Never go to see your uncle who is your sworn enemy. If any of his men will suspect you from your face, you will be caught and killed. My son, you resemble your dear father whom you have not seen."

Nigrodha — "Nobody can know that I am my father's son. People must have forgotten my father's face. And, I look like the son of any lay Buddhist. I assure you, I shall observe my uncle's face from a distance. I want to see how he looks like a king or a monster !"

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Sumana "No, do not approach even the distant shadows of his soldiers. They will suspect you because of your very age. You are aged nine, and everybody knows that Susima's son is a nine-year old boy."

Nigrodha "I promise, I shall not go anywhere nearer to my uncle or his soldiers. I shall be near the Kalinga prisoners and the nuns. All that I want is to have a glimpse of the face of uncle Asoka ?"

Sumana stands silent in prayerful mood. Nigrodha runs away.

Scene 2

Forest Road **Prisoners, Nigrodha, Karuvaki**

The Magadhan army is on its march. Asoka is in his chariot in front of his army. The Kalinga prisoners are in extreme misery. The Magadhans are in their worst form, using whips on prisoners who fail to keep pace with others. The wounded are unable to walk. One of them faints and falls. A soldier runs to him and beats him up. From among the nuns runs Karuvaki to his rescue. She looks at the Magadhan with frowning eyes.

Karuvaki "Does your cruelty know no bounds ? Look at his wounds, hear his agonising voice, see if he has sense or not, and next use your whip if you have no heart. Dear friend, he is as good a man as you are".

Karuvaki bends over the prostrate body. She puts candy in his mouth. As Karuvaki raises her face, she finds the face of boy Nigrodha, full of compassion and feeling.

Nigrodha "Aunt, how noble you are ! Can I be of any use to you in your gracious service to these unfortunate prisoners !"

Karuvaki gives a kiss on Nigrodha's forehead. From a running chariot, Yasas finds the face of Karuvaki from a distance.

Scene 3

Monastery: Interior **Sumana, Monk**

Inside her small room in the monastery, Sumana is offering prayers to Buddha while impatiently waiting for Nigrodha's return. A monk comes in.

Monk "Sister ! Your son has requested me to inform you that he will stay with the monks and nuns to serve the Kalinga prisoners. He requests you not to worry for him."

Sumana (*in fear*) "What do you say ? How far has the boy gone ?"

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Monk "Not very far from this place. The army and the prisoners will halt for the night in the forest of Uruvillva. Nigrodha will be available with the monks and nuns who will be also halting at a distance from the army."

Sumana (*Weeping*) "I shall run to bring him back. He does not know what he is doing."

Scene 4

Night: Forest **Karuvaki, Nuns, Nigrodha, Sumana**

At an open space inside the dense forest of Uruvillva, the nuns are cooking meals for themselves and preparing liquid food for sick prisoners. Near to them, near the fire place, are sitting Karuvaki, Nigrodha and Sumana.

Sumana "Sister ! Nigrodha, my little son, says he will not go back with me to the monastery. Instead, he wants to go with you as far as Pataliputra. He wants to serve the sick prisoners. Would you kindly persuade him to go back with me ?"

Nigrodha "Maa ! Can your Nigrodha go back from the sick and the sufferers ? How will Buddha Tathagata think of his conduct ?"

Karuvaki looks to the face of Nigrodha and turns to his mother.

Karuvaki "Dear sister ! I am proud of your son. When deep darkness of violence has covered the earth, your little son is like a little lamp of Buddha to show light to the depraved ! He will serve the cause of the Lord in our company better than in the monastery."

Sumana feels upset, but regains confidence.

Sumana "As I cannot live without him, give me your mercy to join you in your journey".

She looks at Karuvaki with pathetic eyes.

Karuvaki "You are welcome, sister, most welcome. I am Karuvaki, the daughter of a fisherman of Kalinga. But, you look like a princess. Your handsome son also looks like a prince. May I know who you are ?"

Sumana "That I shall tell you later on. For the present, think of me as a Kalinga nun, and as your own elder sister, and this boy as your own son."

Karuvaki "I have also left behind a boy like him in my distant home. He must be missing me very much. But this is a time when we have to forget every personal matter for sake of the suffering humanity."

Karuvaki and Sumana embrace each other and both of them kiss on the forehead of Nigrodha who is falling asleep.

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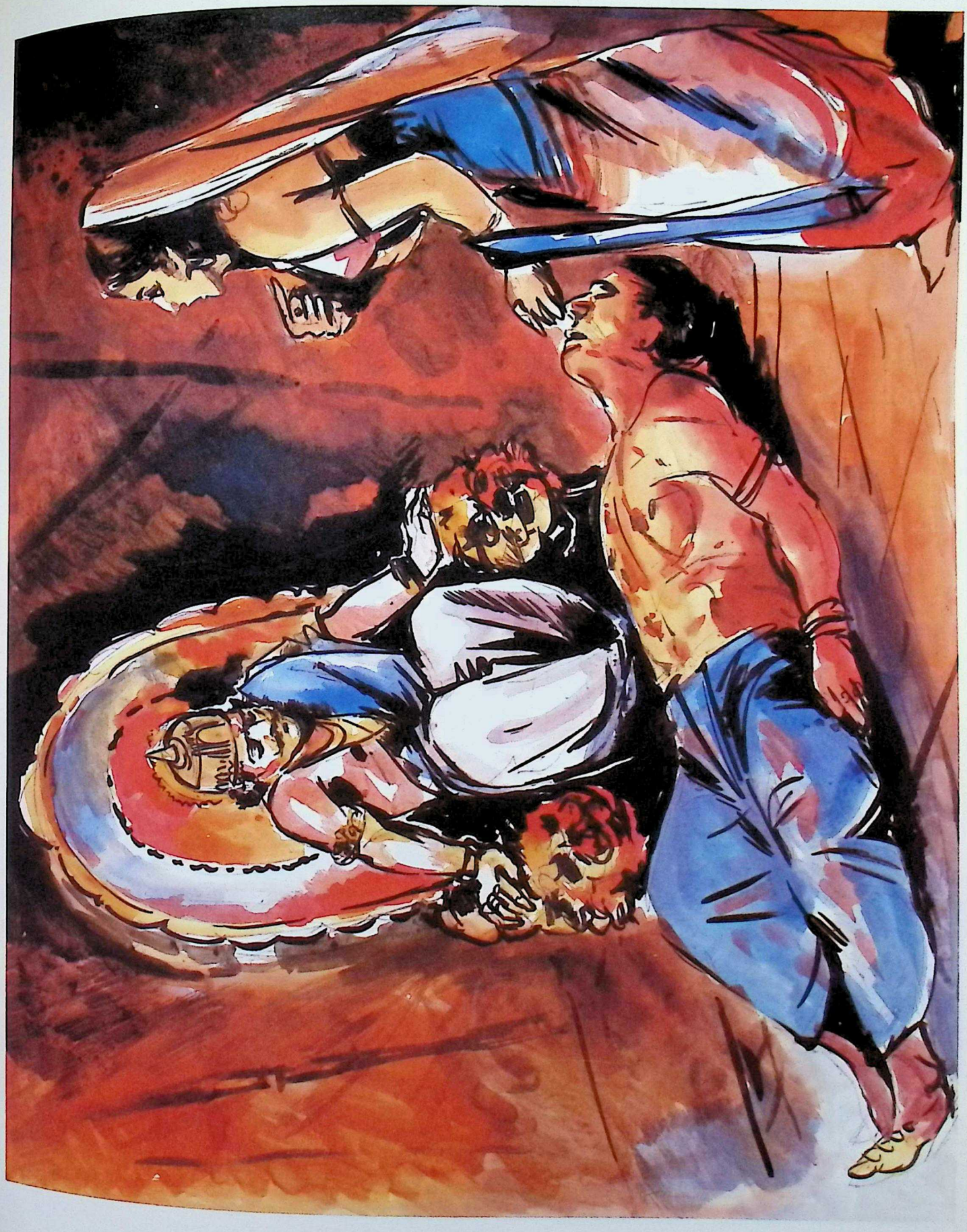

Karuvaki Faces Asoka Inside the Emperor's Tent

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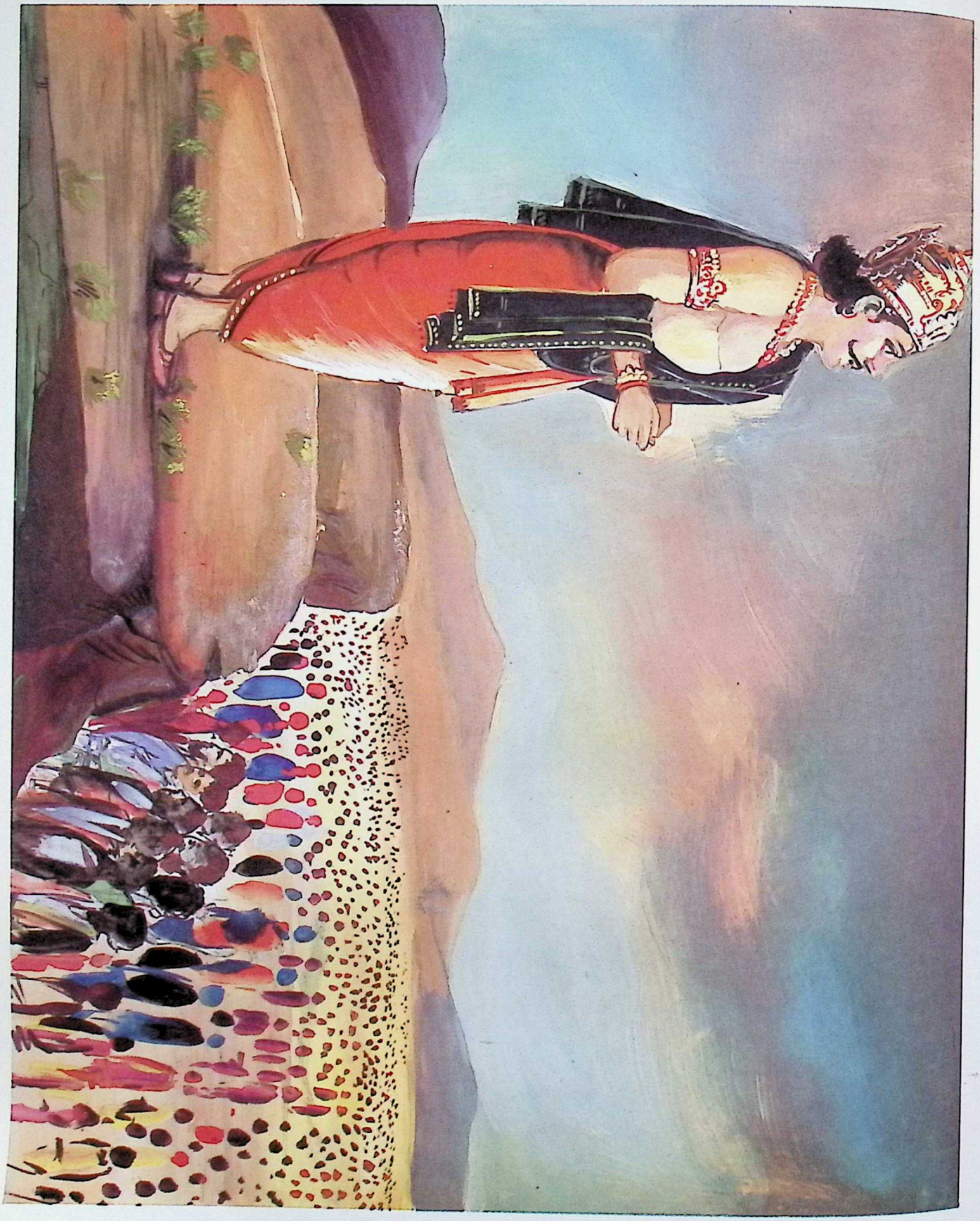

Asoka Observes the Kalinga Prisoners at the Foot of Dhauli

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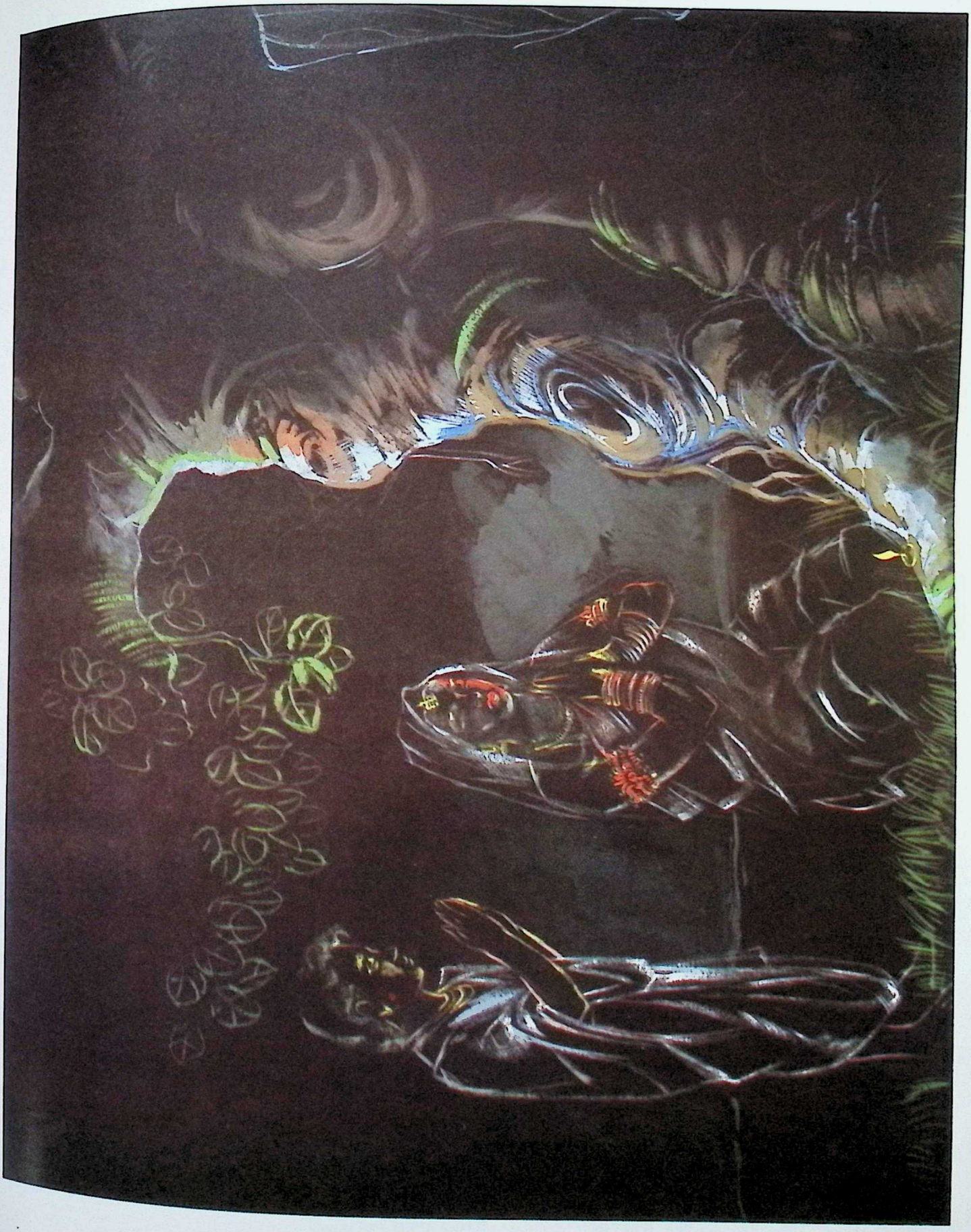

Princess Sumana and Her Son Nigrodha before the Bodhi Tree

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Asoka Holding Dying Nigrodha on Both Arms

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Asoka Breaks his Sword before Dharma-Chakra

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Sannyasi Upagupta is being Received by Emperor Asoka on the Bank of River Ganga

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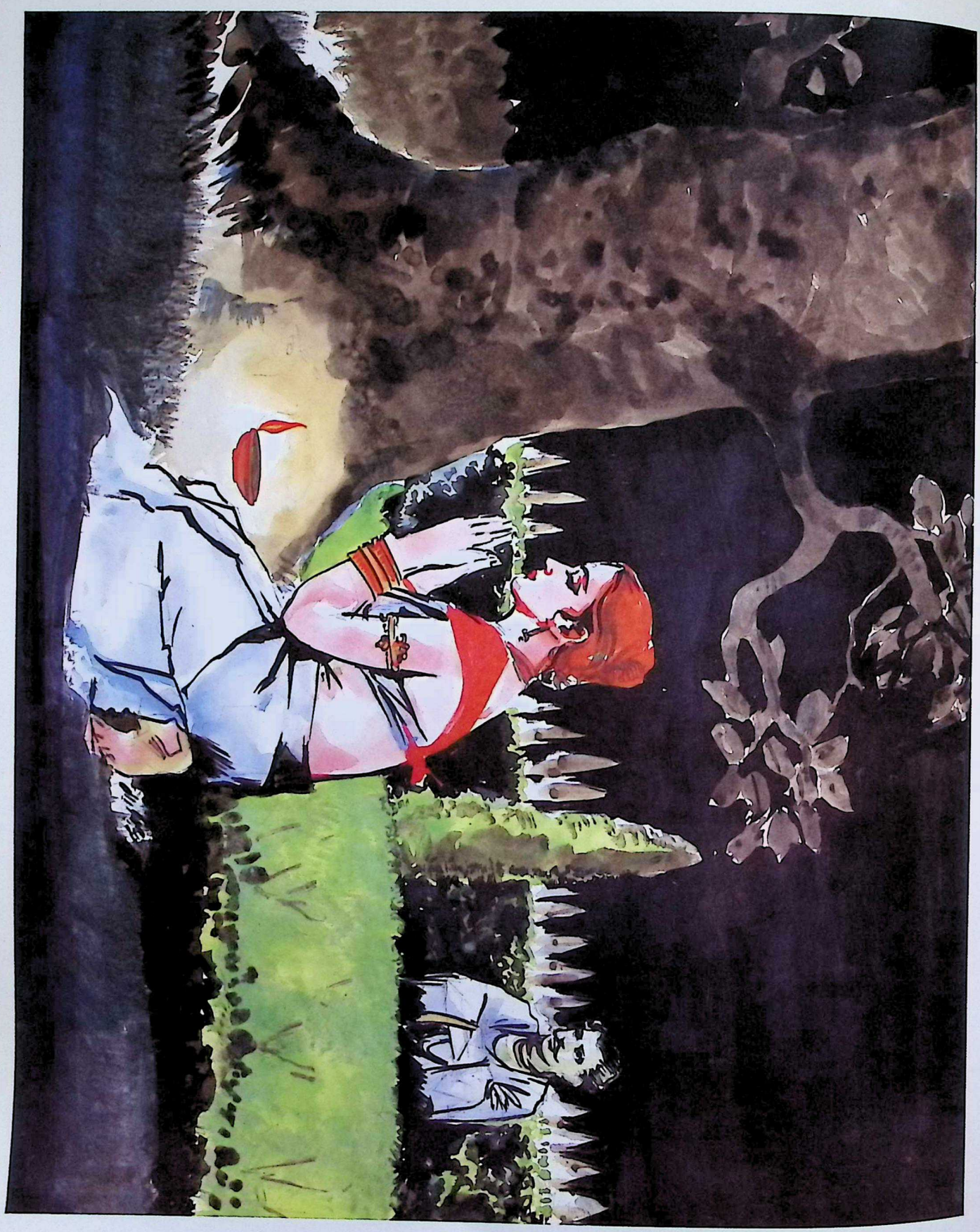

Asoka Observes Karuvaki as she Lights a Lamp at the Birth Place of Buddha in Lumbini Garden

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Scene 5

Highway **Prisoners, Nigrodha**

As the prisoners march forward exhausted and fatigued, Nigrodha tries to cheer them up with a song. He asks them to join him in chorus and repeat his lines.

"Why fear when the Saviour is There, Every moment, everywhere, To bestow His grace, as you suffer To bring to the mortal, In death, immortality Blessed are they who forget death, Knowing of life's great futility, On way to salvation, to bliss of eternity."

Scene 6

Pataliputra: Palace Gate **Asoka, Citizens**

The main street of Pataliputra leading to the gate of the Mauryan Palace is lined up on either side by thousands of citizens who wait in eagerness to welcome their victorious monarch on return from Kalinga.

A chariot, driven by six horses, comes running towards the gate. Flowers are showered on the chariot as the crowds raise thunderous voices of welcome.

People (*in unison*) "Swagatam Vijayi Chakravarti Asoka", "Conqueror of Kalinga, Swagatam, Swagatam."

Asoka is sitting like a statue, with his eyes half-closed and his face pale. He does not look at the crowds, does not wave his hands, does not smile. The chariot enters into the gate of the palace.

Scene 7

Pataliputra: Crossoroad **Magadhan Generals, Prisoners, Nigrodha**

At the main crossroad on the point of entry into Pataliputra city, a Mauryan General orders from his horseback.

General "Soldiers ! Take all the prisoners to Girika's Hell for captivity till the Emperor decides upon their fate."

Soldiers channelise the prisoners to take the route towards the Hell. From among the monks at a far place, Nigrodha comes running to join the prisoners.

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Scene 8

At a Distance **Sumana, Karuvaki, Nuns**

Near the crossroad at a distance are seen the monks and nuns in groups. Among them are Sumana and Karuvaki.

Sumana suddenly finds Nigrodha running with the prisoners towards Girika's Hell. Overtaken by mortal fear she embraces Karuvaki in despair and begins to sob.

Sumana "Karuvaki, save my child. Bring him back to me. He is going with the prisoners not knowing what fate awaits them in that place of death."

Karuvaki "This is not a time to break down and lose faith. The Lord is there to save the child. Let us offer our prayers to Him."

A monk comes to the nuns to announce about their place of stay.

Monk "All of you are required to proceed to the Pataliputra Monastery for your rest and food. Sannyasi Upagupta awaits you there."

Nigrodha having gone out of her sight, Sumana feels deeply nervous. In moments, she faints and falls unconscious. Karuvaki with other nuns lifts her body from ground and they walk towards the monastery in slow steps.

Scene 9

Court Hall **Asoka, Radhagupta, Courtiers, 5 Kalinga Leaders**

The Mauryan Court appears splendid on the occasion of Asoka's return from Kalinga. Loud cheers greet the Emperor as he takes the throne. Radhagupta stands up to make his announcement.

Radhagupta "Honoured Courtiers ! This is the proudest moment in the life every courtier, general, soldier, and citizen of Magadh. Our mighty Emperor has won the most terrific war of human memory. Kalinga has been conquered. A land that proudly defied the power of Magadh has been subdued. A race that threatened our security has been humbled. One lakh and fifty thousand Kalingan soldiers are now in our hands as the prize of our victory. But their obstinate leaders are still unbending. If they do not beg for peace with total submission, the fate of the prisoners will hang on the decree of the Emperor in this august court."

Trumpets are blown outside. Five Kalingan leaders are brought into the court by armed escorts. They are made to stand before the royal pedestal facing the Emperor and the Prime Minister.

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They do not bow down before the throne, but stand erect with their heads held high. The courtiers express resentment to see their discourteous behaviour. Radhagupta gives violent looks. But Asoka's eyes or face show no sign of anger or astonishment.

Radhagupta — "Leaders of Kalinga ! You know by now where you stand at this moment of your life. Take your decision in your own wisdom. Will you submit and go back to your dear land as the subjects of Magadh, or, will you face death for your failure to realise the reality ?"

1st Kalinga Leader — "Your Emperor knows the answer. Yet, if you want it for yourself and your court, let me say -- we will perish without being the subjects of Magadh."

Radhagupta — "Do you not realise that you stand defeated ? Do you not realise that hundreds of thousands of your people have perished ? Will you not seek peace even after this?"

2nd Kalinga Leader — "We are not defeated as per the established rules of battles. To us, your victory is a fraud practised on Kalinga. Did you not yourself send a fake Radhagupta to deceive us with a false offer for peace ? You feel proud that you killed many of our people. But were they not simple folks who came forward to offer resistance to ruthless invaders without being trained soldiers ? Did you wait to fight against our army that was on its way back from outside ? We wonder, how do you claim victory in view of your deception and cowardice?"

Courtiers shout 'Death to these insolent leaders'.

Radhagupta — "Kalingans ! Do you know that never in human memory so many prisoners were taken from a defeated country by any victorious conqueror as our mighty monarch has brought from Kalinga ? Can you imagine their fate ?"

3rd Kalinga Leader — "They know and we know and every Kalingan at home knows that they have come to die. They know that by their death they will earn deathless glory. On the other hand, by killing these unarmed prisoners, you will earn eternal damnation from the posterity to come."

Courtiers (*shouting aloud*) — "Death to all the prisoners. Death to all Kalingans."

Radhagupta looks to the Emperor for final order. The courtiers too look towards his face. But Asoka stands up and leaves the court without a word.

Scene 10

Night : Girika's Hell

Girika, Asoka, Nigrodha, Executioners

Burning torches in hundreds dispel the darkness of the deadly-night of execution inside the

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vast compound of Girika's Hell. One hundred scaffolds, line after line, dazzle under light. At each scaffold stands an executioner with a heavy axe in hand.

At the first of the scaffolds stands Girika, ready to begin execution. Rows of prisoners are made to stand in line behind each scaffold.

At a near distance, on a raised platform is seated Asoka. On his either side are seated his generals. Asoka mutters to his nearest general.

Asoka "Should I have to see this massacre too ! Yes, one who has seen the battle-fields of Kalinga, can also see any ghastly scene without a feeling of revulsion ! Let them do their work. Inscrutable destiny is doing its sordid act."

Girika is at his best. He empties a full vessel of wine and signals to the executioners to begin the work. As Girika lifts his own axe to cut down the first head, Nigrodha, in the dress of a monk, appears from nowhere and stands before him.

Nigrodha "Chanda-Girika ! I have come to beg for your favour ?"

Girika (*laughing*) "Favour ! Inside the Hell ! Here and now !"

Nigrodha "Yes, dear uncle. Here and now ! I request you first to cut down my head before you cut down other heads."

Girika "Are you mad ? Don't you love your life ?

Nigrodha "Under will you tell me what is this life ? Will you tell me - where does it come from ? Where does it go ? And, what is there to love it ?"

Girika "Mad boy ! Do not waste my time talking nonsense. Clear out at once."

Nigrodha "It is not nonsense. If you do not know, let me tell you what life is. Dear uncle, life is an illusion, just an illusion, a dream. Like the sound of the *Veena*, it comes and it goes. Wherefrom and whereto nobody knows. It is full of suffering, full of endless desires, and full of sorrows. So, take my life first, before you take life of my friends. Let me escape the illusion of earthly existence."

Girkia "So be it ! Place your head on the scaffold."

Nigrodha steps forward to place his head on the scaffold. As he stands bending down over the scaffold, a soldier runs from the Emperor's platform and stands in front of Girika.

Soldier "His Majesty wants to see this boy. Stop your execution till he comes back."

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Girika looks furious, but puts down his axe and starts drinking. The soldier escorts Nigrodha to the platform. A Kalinga prisoner is seen rubbing the knots of his rope to release his hands.

Scene 11

Asoka's Platform **Asoka, Nigrodha, Generals**

Nigrodha is brought to Asoka. The Emperor observes his bright innocent face with keen curiosity.

Asoka "Little boy ! May I know who you are ?"

Nigrodha (*similing*)) "Venerable Uncle ! I am the boy you have been searching for long eight years. I am Nigrodha, the posthumous son of your brother Susima whom you killed."

Asoka looks dazed. He comes near to the boy, leaving his seat.

Asoka "Why do you want to die, my boy?"

Nigrodha "Uncle ! Have you not desired to kill me ever since my birth ? If my death will give to my dear and revered uncle a little peace of mind, my soul will find a much greater peace in giving away this momentary life. Your desire to destory me will be destroyed by my death. Allow me to die, dear uncle. It is getting late for your executioners. They have to take the lives of so many of your vicitims. Your desire to kill them will also be destroyed by their death."

Asoka stands perplexed and shaken to hear the words of the little boy.

Asoka "Would you not avenge the death of your father ?"

Nigrodha "Yes, my uncle. I shall avenge it by respecting your life as the most sacred to me ! Buddha Tathagata taught to respect every life, even of the smallest of the creatures. That being so, to me there can be no life more precious than the life of my uncle, the Chakravarti Emperor of Bharat !"

Girika's loud shouts to executioners to begin their work reach the ears of Asoka. Nigrodha too hears Girika's thundering voice.

Nigrodha "Leave me uncle to die first. Give the dust of your feet to sanctify my head before it rolls on earth."

He kneels down and takes dust from Asoka's feet.

Asoka (*stern voice*) "No, my dear son, no. You shall not die. I shall not see you die."

Nigrodha "Uncle ! Are not these prisoners also your sons ?"

He runs away to reach Girika's scaffold.

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Scene 12

Near Girika's Scaffold **Girika, Nigrodha, Asoka, Prisoners**

Nigrodha appears before Girika's axe and bows down to put his little head on the scaffold. In a twinkle of the eye, Asoka suddenly appears before Girika who now dead drunk and unable to recognise the Emperor.

Girika (*looking at Nigrodha's head*) "Foolish boy ! Go to hell."

He lifts his axe.

Asoka (*in loud voice*) "Girika ! Stop it. Stop."

Girika fails to recognise Asoka and fails to control himself.

Girika (*to Asoka*) "You dare ask me to stop ? Once Girika's hand is raised, it does not know to come down till the work is done."

Asoka "I order, put down your axe. I order, stop the executions."

Girika "Stop executions ! Why ? What for ? These bloody Kalingans have killed all my brothers in battles. They have killed my two sons. They have killed many of my dear Magadhans ! I must kill them all."

Asoka (*in thundering voice*) "You monster ! Obey your Emperor."

Girika is able to recognise Asoka only partly, but unbale to control himself.

Girika "You call me monster ! Yes, I am a monster, a Chanda-Girika like you, a Chandasoka. I killed hundreds of human beings to please you. This night I shall prove myself a real monster by killing you for my own pleasure. Let Chandasoka die in the Hell of Chanda-Girika !"

In lightening speed, Girika strikes his axe on Asoka when Nigrodha stands before him to save his life. The axe heavily falls on Nigrodha's breast. While sinking to ground, the boy cries out 'uncle, my uncle' !

Asoka kneels down on Nigrodha's body when Girika raises his axe high up to cut down his head. The nearest prisoner who has released his hands from the rope springs up to action. He falls upon Girika, takes away his axe, and throws him to ground. Asoka's generals overpower a madly furious and wildly violent Girika.

Asoka lifts up Nigrodha from the ground and places his body on both of his arms. The boy looks at his uncle's eyes and mutters.

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Nigrodha "May Buddha Tathagata see the hands of my uncle which hold me to save my life. The hands which have taken numberless lives are now the hands to save life. May Buddha bless my uncle !"

He looks at Asoka's eyes with pathos. Asoka turns towards the executioners.

Asoka (*in loud voice*) "Throw down your axes.

The executioners drop down the axes. Asoka looks to Kalinga prisoners.

Asoka "My dear brave and noble souls ! You are free. Go back to your land to announce to your heroic countrymen that they have conquered their conqueror. They have taught me that the conquest by sword is not the real conquest, the real conquest is the conquest of heart."

Asoka looks to the face of Nigrodha, shocked and sorrowful.

Nigrodha "Uncle ! At this very moment you have earned immortality. The blessings of Tathagata will be with you for ever hereafter. Uncle, please take me to my mother in the monastery before I die."

He closes his eyes. Blood drops down from his breast. Holding Nigrodha on his arms, Asoka walks forward in quick steps. The prisoners, generals and the executioners follow him in silence as he goes out of the Hell.

Scene 13

Night: Hell

The captives of Girika in the Hell come out of their cells, take out the burning torches and run wildly from corner to corner to put the entire complex to fire. Flames rise to the sky as the Hell turns to ashes.

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Episode Forty

Commentary: Asoka comes under an abrupt change of heart. His soul thirsts for a new direction to find solace and peace. Sannyasi Upagupta shows him the path towards a new horizon. Asoka is transformed from a Chandasoka to a Dharmasoka.

Scene 1

Late Night: Gate of Hell **Mahindra, Sanghamitra, Monks**

In stark darkness outside the gate to the Hell stand Mahindra, Sanghamitra with some monks, with grave fear and misapprehensions about the happenings inside the compound in that fateful night of execution. They stand shocked to see the smokes rising up. But soon they see a silent procession of men heading towards the gate.

Emerges from the gate Emperor Asoka with a blood-soaked boy on his arms. He finds a monk at the gate and looks to him with appealing eyes.

Asoka "Venerable Bhikshu ! Be kind to your king to lead him to the Kukkutarama monastery. Do show me the path."

The monk walks in front of the Emperor. The Emperor is followed by a solemn humanity of prisoners, soldiers and executioners. Mahindra and Sanghamitra slip out of the group of monks and walk fast in darkness towards their destination.

Scene 2

Dawn: Monastery **Mahindra, Sanghamitra, Upagupta**

Mahindra and Sanghamitra reach the monastery to inform Sannyasi Upagupta about the coming of the Emperor.

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Mahindra "Revered Preceptor ! This dawn seems to bring to the monastery the rays of the blessings of the Master. My father the Emperor is himself coming to see you while Hell is burning behind. He stopped the executions and freed the prisoners. I wonder, if he a changed man !"

Upagupta looks upward to Heaven.

Upagupta "It is the work of the Lord. At this moment of Asoka's worst violenc, Buddha has cast His spell on him ! May the Master show him the light!"

Sanghamitra "But I saw on his arms bleeding boy. May be Nigrodha ?

She sobs.

Scene 3

Inside Monastery **Devi, Sumana**

Sumana is lying in stupor on the floor in her room. Devi is sitting near her head.

Sumana "Where is my Nigrodha ? Did the monks go to bring him back ? Did Mahindra go ? Can my son escape from the Hell ? Oh Lord ! What have you done to me !"

Devi "Soon will Nigrodha come back with Mahindra. Let us have faith in the Will of the Omnipotent !"

Devi hears murmuring voices outside. She goes out to see.

Scene 4

Monastery: Exterior **Asoka, Nigrodha, Upagupta, Others**

At the first glow of the dawn Asoka appears outside the Kukkutarama monastery with the dying Nigrodha on his arms. Behind him are lines of prisoners, executioners and soldiers, all coming in breathless silence.

Upagupta steps forward to receive the Emperor. He is taken aghast to see the body of Nigrodha on Asoka's arms. Asoka kneels down calmly and places the boy on soft grass at the feet of the Sannyasi. Sanghamitra runs from behind and bends over the face of Nigrodha. Nigrodha opens his eyes.

Nigrodha "Sister ! Where is my mother ? Ask her to come to my uncle."

Helped by Devi, Sumana soon reaches her son and bends over his bleeding breast. Nigrodha looks at his mother with a serene face.

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Nigrodha "Maa ! Look at the miracle of Buddha Tathagata. My dear uncle has brought me to you in his own arms ! Feel happy to see his affection for me. Allow me to close my eyes as I see you near my uncle. Shun hatred from mind once for all. Give your blessings to my uncle, and receive his adoration."

In faint voice Nigrodha utters the the words "Buddham Saranam Gachchhami" and breathes his last. Sumana takes up his body to her breast without tears in her eyes.

Upagupta "Blessed Nigrodha has attained Nirvana. The Will of the Lord is done."

Sumana and Devi go inside the monastery carrying the dead Nigrodha. Asoka looks towards Upagupta in deep anguish.

Asoka "Blessed Sannyasi ! Nigrodha saved my life by giving his life. He left his body before showing me the path. Will his immortal soul be like a lamp to remove darkness from my mind ? I realise what I have done so far. Advise me what shall I do hereafter ! Do to me what Nigrodha would have liked to do."

Upagupta "May the death of boy Nigrodha also see the death of the King's former self ! That is what the Lord wills. Nigrodha appeared before you as an angel of Buddha."

Asoka "What does Buddha intend for a Chandasoka who has turned this earth red with human blood ! What does Buddha intend to see in a man of violence who has desecrated the land of Bharat with his evil deeds !"

Upagupta "Buddha Tathagata turned the Dharma Chakra - the Eternal Wheel of Law - for the salvation of mankind. It was the Wheel of Right over the Wheel of Might, the Wheel of Virtues and Righteousness against the cycle of evil deeds and wrong doings. Your Majesty may now enter upon the noble path shown by the Enlightened One, and turn the Wheel of Right by giving up the wheel of might which you hold in your hand as the Emperor of Bharat."

Asoka turns his eyes towards the Dharma Chakra engraved on a hard rock in front of the monastery. He gets up from grass and walks slowly towards the rock.

The assembled crowds see with surprise the action of the King. Asoka takes out his sword from the scabbard, holds it upward in both hands, and throws it with all his might at the foot of the rock. The sword breaks to halves and falls to ground.

Asoka returns to his position and sits cross-legged before Upagupta.

Upagupta "Emperor ! You have shown by your action what the Buddha desired for man. You have obtained His blessings to lead a life of bliss. Humanity will now await the work of King Asoka as a Missionary-Monarch."

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From inside the monastery come out Vidisha Devi, Mahindra and Sanghamitra as they see Asoka sitting before Upagupta for initiation. The congregation of prisoners and executioners sit in calm silence with folded hands. Devi with her son and daughter sits near the Emperor. Upagupta begins to recite:

Upagupta "Buddham Saranam Gachchhami".

Asoka "Buddham Saranam Gachchhami". (*The congregation joins in chorus*)

Upagupta "Dharmam Saranam Gachchhami".

Asoka and Others "Dharmam Saranam Gachchhami".

Upagupta "Sangham Saranam Gachchhami."

Asoka and Others "Sangham Saranam Gachchhami."

Upagupta (*to Asoka*) "Aryaputra ! I recite a saying of the Enlightened one: "Happy the solitude of the peaceful, who knows and beholds truth; "Happy is he who stands firmly unmoved, who holds himself in check at all times. "Happy he whose every sorrow, whose every wish is at an end. "The conquest of the stubbornness of the ego-ity is truly the supreme happiness."

Asoka bows his head to ground.

Upagupta "Aryaputra ! You have conquered the stubbornness of your self. You are now in possession of the key to happiness. May you use this key for the happiness of the human race!"

Asoka gets up. He comes near to Vidisha Devi, Mahindra and Sanghamitra. The congregation looks at the Emperor with love and reverence.

Scene 5

Maurya Place: Courtyard **Asoka, Kalinga Prisoners, Karuvaki**

In the courtyard of the Maurya palace are assembled the released Kalinga prisoners, the Kalingan monks and nuns, and also Karuvaki. Asoka climbs to a raised platform with the five Kalinga leaders. They face the assemblage.

Asoka "Go back my sons to your beloved countrymen. You have remained *Avijita*, the unconquered. Instead, you have conquered Asoka. You have destroyed the Chandasoka in me. In return, I shall inscribe on the imperishable rock of Dhauli the motto of my rule to follow -- All men are my children, and just as I desire for my own children that they should have bliss and happiness both in this world and the other world, so also I desire the same for all men. And, at other places all over Bharat I shall

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describe on stone the futility of violence and of wars. It is not by sword that one conquers another, but by love. Let my war with Kalinga be the last war of my life. Carry my love for the people of your country. Soon shall I try to heal up the wounds inflicted on my dear Kalingans.''

From among the Kalinga nuns, Karuvaki steps forward towards the platform and faces Asoka on dais.

Karuvaki ''Aryaputra ! If the Chandasoka is dead after the Kalinga War, my countrymen hereafter will call you DHARMASOKA.''

The Kalingans give a thunderous applause and raise a deafening slogan:

Kalingans ''Blessed be Dharmasoka. Hail Dharamasoka, the Emperor of Bharat.''

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Episode Forty-One

Commentary: Asoka begins his carrer as a missionary-monarch. His transformation alarms the Prime Minister and his colleagues who find in his new role a great threat to the very fabric of the Mauryan polity.

Scene 1

Yasas' Hut — **Yasas, Karuvaki**

Initiated into the Buddhist Order, Yasas lives as a monk in a hut, still recovering from his wounds. Karuvaki comes to take leave of him before her departure for Kalinga.

Yasas — "Karuvaki! You transformed a monster like me to a monk. Your brave people transformed a Chandasoka to a benevolent King. You have done a wonder by calling him Dharmasoka. This very term will work upon his mind to uphold the Laws of Buddha."

Karuvaki — "I hope, Asoka will indeed work as a Dharmasoka. With my work done, I have come to take farewell of you to return to my homeland. We may not meet again in future."

Yasas looks sorry to hear the words of Karuvaki.

Yasas — "Return to your homeland! Yes, you can go back to your dear people, to your dearest Aira, and to your beloved country! But should you abandon Asoka at this stage when he is just beginning to change himself ? Unless I and you work together to convert him to the Faith of Buddha, who knows what will happen to him! He may once again return to his old ways of kingly violence and vices."

Yasas gets up form his bed and holds the hand of Karuvaki.

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Yasas "Sister! It is your words on that fateful night inside his tent on Dhauli that the conquest by sword is no real conquest which vibrated in Asoka's mind all along his return journey. I appeal to you in the name of Tathagata Buddha to stay in the monastery till Asoka embraces Buddhism as a lay disciple. His utterances before Sannyasi Upagupta after Nigrodha's death are no proof of conversion!"

Karuvaki thinks over the issue in seriousness.

Karuvaki "What role can this humble fisherman's daughter play in the life of a great king?"

Yasas "Divine Will may take its own course. I have a feeling that Asoka will like to hear your words of wisdom. As he himself has said to me, he finds in you a ray of spirituality. Your goodness is your worth."

Karuvaki goes out as Yasas looks on.

Scene 2

City Gate **Karuvaki, Kalinga Leaders**

Kalinga Leaders are being given a hearty send off by the Magadhan citizens. The Leadrs are seated in a chariot and the generals on horse-back. Hundreds of carts and elephants are ready to carry the ex-prisoners to their country.

Karuvaki comes near to the leaders and bows her head.

Karuvaki "Revered leaders! For a time I am staying back in the monastery with my sister nuns from Kalinga. But I shall be soon back in my country to look after dear Aira. Carry to him my deepest affection and also tell him and others not to bear ill-will towards Asoka and the Magadhans. Let us accept the judgement of destiny with grace."

A Leader "Do not worry about Aira. We are there to look after him. And, as long as Asoka regards us as unconquered, and as long as he works as Dharma-soka, we shall have no ill-will or malice towards his people."

Trumpets are heard at the gate.

Scene 3

Same **Asoka, Vitasoka, Karuvaki**

Asoka emerges with his brother Vitasoka in a chariot at the gate. Soldiers raise arms to salute. An emtpy chariot is ready to carry Vitasoka to Kalinga. Asoka and Vitasoka get down. The latter bows down before the elder in a parting gesture.

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Asoka "Vitasoka! You are accompanying the Kalinga people to their country as my viceroy. Go there as a friend of the people. Your prime concern will be how to heal the wounds caused by the war."

Vitasoka "Faithfully shall I discharge my duties in making Kalinga a model territory as far as welfare works are concerned. I shall carry out your orders as and when I receive them. Your benevolence as a paternal monarch will be reflected fully on the soil of Kalinga."

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Asoka puts his hand on Vitasoka's head. The Prince enters into his waiting chariot near to the chariot of the Kalinga leaders. Asoka's eyes catch Karuvaki standing near the leaders. She comes nearer to the Emperor as the chariots begin to move.

Asoka "Karuvaki! Are you leaving us too, or, staying with us? I am beginning to follow your advice to conquer the hearts of men. Do you think I shall be able to perform this unique work?"

Karuvaki "Rajan! You are already in your role as Dharmasoka. You have taken your first step to conquer the hearts of your worst enemies who you brought here to punish. Are they not going back happy? That is the conquest of heart. No hatred, no anger, no malice and no violence; instead, love, compassion, piety and non-violence -- these are the ways to conquer."

Asoka "I am glad to hear your pleasing words. Should you not enlighten me more and more about this new conquest?"

Karuvaki "The Enlightened One alone will show to you the Light on your new path. We may only be His instruments."

As the chariots of the Kalingans start rolling and the trumpets are blown, Karuvaki bows before the Emperor and proceeds towards the departing Kalingans to wave her hand in bidding farewell. Asoka observes her gesture with admiring eyes.

Scene 4

Night: Queen's Apartment **Asandhimitra, Maids, Asoka**

Queen Asandhimitra has given birth to her son. She is lying in critical condition after the birth of the child. Asoka comes in to see the baby.

Asandhimitra "Aryaputra! You wanted a son, and the God has blessed you with one. My moments are now numbered. I leave the child in your hand."

Asoka comes near to the child to observe its face. His face however appears grave to see the face of the queen, pale and white.

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Asoka "Maharani! You will soon recover from the sickness of delivery. God Almighty will see to it that a future emperor grows to manhood under the care and affection of his mother."

Asoka puts his palm on the queen's forehead.

Scene 5

Asoka's Apartment **Asoka, Astrologer, Baby**

With the baby son on his lap Asoka is sitting on his bed while an astrologer is busy calculating the position of the stars at the time of the birth of the child.

Asoka "Jyotishacharya! Queen Asandhimitra loved me dearly, but she has gone to her heavenly abode. Her son is now the dearest to my life. Look, how beautiful are the child's eyes! I have never seen such eyes in any human being."

Astrologer "These eyes contain the signs of divine attributes. I suggest that his name be given 'Kunala' because of these wonderful eyes. As the stars show, the child will some day become a messenger of divine love."

Asoka "If the stars store for him a good future, why did they curse him at his birth to deny him his mother's love? Unfortunate is the child who does not enjoy its mother's affection."

Astrologer "Your Majesty! The stars show that this child will not miss the affection of a mother."

Asoka kisses the child and fondles him on his lap as the astrologer goes out.

Scene 6

Asoka's Apartment **Asoka, Yasas**

Able to walk and work, Yasas comes to meet the Emperor and talk to him.

Yasas "Your Majesty! I tried my best to persuade Vidisha Devi to stay near you. But, as you know, she has to complete her great work at Sanchi. With Sumana, Mahindra and Sanghamitra she therefore left the Kukkutarama monastery. Sannyasi Upagupta too his left for Mathura."

Asoka "I know Devi will never come back to the palce. Left her be happy with her mission. I am proud of her and of of her children. They did a great work in the battle fields of Kalinga. When my soldiers went on killing unknown number of men, Devi's army of monks and nuns went on saving life and serving the sick at numberless places."

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Yasas "The Kalingans have gone back. But who knows what will be their attitude towards Magadh!"

Asoka "They will be in peace with us."

Yasas "Rajan! The wound is deep. It has touched their racial pride. It is not by sending a good viceroy by giving a benevolent administration that one can win them over. It is by a different balm that you can heal up the wounds on their ego."

Asoka (*in surpirse*) "What more can I do to satisfy their ego? I have released their leaders and prisoners. I have sent my own brother to look after them."

Yasas "The broken pride of the enraged Kalingans has to be restored by a gesture which will give a proof of Your Majesty's personal respect towards that proud race. I have something in my mind, but am afraid of speaking it to you."

Aska (*Smiling*) "Afraid of speaking! Are you still in doubt that I do not respect your wishes! Do you still feel that I may reject your sound advice? Plese tell me how to satisfy the vanity of the Kalingans!"

Yasas "I feel, if the Chakravarti Monarch of Magadh can marry a daughter of the Kalingan race and take her as his queen, even the most arrogant of the Kalingans will soft down."

Asoka "Yasas! What do you mean?"

Yasas "Your Majesty! You have no queen by your side after the death of Asandhimitra. Devi will never be back to stay as a queen. Why not marry Karuvaki who combines in her the virtues of both Vidisha Devi and Asandhimitra! She is a noble soul possessing spiritual insight as well as sound intelligence. The Kalingans adore her as the matron of boy Aira. She may very well be the mother of Kunala. And, this marriage will convince the Kalinga race that Emperor Asoka has genuine respect and love for them. This single act will develop friendship and cordiality between Magadh and Kalinga on a stronger foundation than all your benevolent or paternal acts."

Asoka's face brightens up. Yasas continues.

Yasas "Aryaputra! You can realise the worth of Karuvaki only when you take her to your heart. This marriage will not be like a mere matrimonial alliance between Magadh and Kalinga, but much more than that -- a mental alliance between a Dharmasoka and a spiritual consort for elevation of souls."

Asoka "Will Karuvaki like to marry a former Chandasoka?"

Yasas (*smiling*) "If only you offer your love to her!"

Asoka smiles.

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Scene 7

Radhagupta's House **Radhagupta, Tishya Rakshita**

With deep interest, Radhagupta is going through a royal decree of a new kind when Tishya Rakshita comes in.

Radhagupta "What news do you bring when I am mentally perturbed to go through this imperial order which sounds like a religious sermon?"

Tishya "Mentally perturbed! Your King has conquered Kalinga. You are the happiest man at this hour of victory!"

Radhagupta "But the King says that the Kalingans have conquered him to lead him towards a path of no war. Is it a good sign for the future of the Empire! These prisoners after return will cry for vengeance. Their armies have come back from the colonies. They have now a prince to be raised to the throne. And, our King offers peace to them. Can a cobra give up its poison after drinking milk! Supposing that they invade, what can you do with your no-war policy?"

Tishya "Mahamantriji! I do not understand why should you be unnecessarily exercised when the Emperor is going by the advice of Yasas to overcme all possible threats? Chakravarti Asoka is thinking of marrying a Kalingan girl to win over the heart of the Kalingan race."

She smiles cunningly.

Radhagupta "Do I hear you correctly? Who is that girl?"

Tishya "Please guess who can she be! Wait for their love to develop, wait for the marriage to take place, and wait to see Kalinga in peace. Further more, you also wait to see yourself replaced as Prime Minister by the emerging great sage of our time, Yasas."

She laughs and leaves. Radhagupta broods over her words.

Scene 8

Monastery **Asoka, Karuvaki, Nuns, Monks**

Inside a spacious hall of the Kukkutarama monastery, Karuvaki is offering prayers and singing hymns with other nuns. Dim lamps burn all around the hall. Asoka enters with a monk and takes his seat at a secluded corner. The prayer over, Karuvaki comes to Asoka and bows her head in respect.

Asoka "I liked your hymns to my heart's content."

Karuvaki "Rajan! You will like the hymns more if you are initiated to the Faith. These simple hymns will resound in your heart as the sermons of peace

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and happiness when your soul surrenders to Buddha, your body to the Sangha, and your mind to the eternal laws of Dharma.''

Asoka — ''Karuvaki! Why then deny me this privilege of bliss! My mind is tormented for what I have done so far. Nocturnal dreams bring to me the spectre of my terrible deeds. I wake to feel hunted by my past. I fear my own shadow. I grope in darkness, but find no lamp. I try to escape, but do not know where and how!''

Asoka's face is full of sorrows.

Karuvaki — ''Aryaputra! Escape lies in initiation. Initiation brings light to soul. Enlightenment puts an end to worries. Torrents of peace rain over the flames of sorrows.''

Asoka stands thoughtful. Karuvaki's face glows brighter and beautiful.

Scene 9

Bank of River — **Asoka, Karuvaki, Yasas, Monks, Upagupta, People**

Asoka, Yasas, monks and Karuvaki wait at the river ghat to receive Sannyasi Upagupta from a decorated boat. A large number of people are assembled to observe the royal reception to the great Sannyasi. As the boat halts, the Emperor goes down to knee-deep water to receive him. The Sannyasi extends his right hand towards Asoka who holds the arm to help Upagupta to step down.

Upagupta places his feet on a wooden plank to walk towards the ghat. Asoka, holding his hand and wading through water, helps the Sannyasi to walk on the plank. The monks shower flowers on the Sannyasi as he lands on the bank.

Scene 10

River Bank — **Radhagupta, 2 Ministers, Chief Priest**

At a distance from the ghat, under a big tree, are standing Radhagupta with two ministers and the chief priest. They observe the scene of Asoka receiving the Sannyasi with extreme humility.

Radhagupta — ''Oh Heaven! What a disgusting scene to see! The royal dignity is drowned in the water of the Ganga when a king descends to knee-deep water to receive an ordinary monk!''

Ist Minister — ''Is it a fact that the Sannyasi has been invited to initiate the Emperor to Buddhism?''

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Radhagupta "Yes. You are true."

Chief Priest "Mahamantriji! For Heaven's sake, please do intervene. Tell the Sanyasi not to destroy the empire by converting the Emperor to Buddhism. Warn him of the consequences of his action. Upagupta is taking advantage of the momentary weakness in the mind of the Emperor caused by his violence in Kalinga. He has come to make that weakness permanent, and to make the empire weak."

Scene 11

Monastery **Upagupta, Radhagupta, Karuvaki**

On arrival at Pataliputra, Sannyasi Upagupta stays in the Kukkutarama monastrey. Late in the evening, after his meditation is over, Radhagupta enters into his room. Upagupta receives him with courtesy and offers him a seat near him.

Upagupta "Mahamantri! You could have asked me to see in your place instead of coming to this monastery."

Radhagupta "It is my need to see you here on behalf of the council of ministers. I am here on behalf of the people of the Maurya Empire, if not on behalf of the Empire!"

Upagupta "I am in your service as a Bhikshu. Whatever is within my humble ability, I am ready to do in the interest of all."

Radhagupta "Sannyasi! Once I had told you on the eve of the Kalinga War that your ways are different from the ways of the earthly kings and their governments. I have come to repeat the same appeal before you for the sake of the empire and its people. The Chakravarti King of Bharat cannot be a disciple of your Holy Order!"

Upagupta "The Emperor of Bharat is also required to serve the cause of the humanity at large by being a patron of the Buddhist Sangha. It is the will of the Emperor to bcome a lay disciple of the Order in order to serve his people not just as a king but also as their spiritual guide. Will it not serve the glory of Bharat which breathes the spirit of divinity, peace and spirituality?"

Radhagupta "Can you visualise a non-violent monarch who can rule, with turbulent peoples everywhere, hostile elements in and outside, and enemy countries threatening his territory from across the frontiers? What will happen if fear disappears from the mind of the ever-mischievous and ever-wicked persons? I tremble to think of these omens. As the Prime Minister of Magadh, I appeal to your noble felf also to visualise like me a dark future to follow."

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Upagupta "Mahamantri! I visualise a different picture. In my vision, I find a king who will change the turbulent character of his subjects and lead them on a spiritual path to live in fraternal harmony, in meekness and mildness, thinking of a higher life of perfection. I see the bright prospects of peace with all other kings of the external world who will renounce war and embrace the gospels of human brotherhood irrespective of races ad languages, territories and frontiers which separate men from men. Let the Emperor of Bharat be a missionary-monarch for the whole world and rule over the heart of mankind even of the far-away countries. His spiritual role may surpass all political roles of the kings of the past. I appeal to you as the Prime Minister and to all of the other minister to help your monarch to serve the cause of the humanity in the name of a Faith which stands for universal peace and cosmopolitan brotherhood. Let this be a unique experiment in the annals of mankind."

Radhagupta gets up agitated.

Radhagupta "It seems that you are bent upon to convert Emperor Asoka to Buddhism, and through him all his subjects ! May the Almighty forbid this misfortune to this land of the heroes!"

Karuvaki comes in when Radhagupta is about to leave. Radhagupta looks at her graceful body and sharp eyes with curiosity and anger.

Karuvaki "Mahamantriji! Is it less heroic to convert a violent mankind to non-violence? Is not this great land of heroes also a land of a Mahavira Jaina and Gautama Buddha? Your Emperor may have a greater role to play as a Buddhist than the role he plays at present. He may appear as a real conqueror of his people and of other peoples outside his land! The might of Alexander proved ephemeral, but who knows, the might of Asoka may turn eternal!"

Radhagupta "So, you are that Kalingra girl who coined the term Dharmasoka and who aspires to be ..."

Radhagupta goes out in a hush while Karuvaki stands perplexed to hear the incomplete sentence of the Prime Minister.

Scene 12

Monastery

Upagupta, Asoka, Karuvaki, Monks, Nuns, People

On an open gound in front of the monastery, a large number of monks, nuns and people are seated in solemn silence. Sannyasi Upagupta performs the initiation ceremony of Asoka as a Lay Disciple, not a Bhikshu.

Upagupta "May I recite the *Arya Satya* as propounded by the Tathagata. The First Truth is the Truth of Pain and Sorrow. Birth is pain, old age is pain,

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sickness is pain, death is pain. The existence of this pain is in the nature of life.

The Second Truth is the Truth of the Cause of Pain and Sorrow. This Cause is the Desire, or the *Trishna*, the lust and thirst for all wordly things.

The Third Truth is the Truth to end the Pain or Sorrow. This end or cessation of pain is possible by ending the Desires. Elimination of Desires is to lead to the end of sorrows. It is like the end of life and death. It is the real freedom or emancipation.

The Fourth Truth is the Truth to end the Desires. The end of the Desires comes as one walks on the *Arya Astangika Marga* -- the Noble Eight-fold Path -- the Path of Right Vision, Right Aims, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Meditation.

Your Majesty! You are initiated to the Faith and are required to follow from now the Noble Eight-fold Path.''

Asoka bows down to ground as Upagupta recites the Hymn:

''Buddham Saranam Gachchhami, ''

''Dharmam Saranam Gachchhami,

''Sangham Saranam Gachchhami.''

The congregation of people join the chorus. Asoka gets up from ground. Karuvaki comes to him.

Karuvaki ''Rajan! From now on you are Devanam Priya Priyadarshi Raja Asoka.''

Asoka ''What do you mean by this new epithet for this Lay Dsiciple?''

Karuvaki ''I mean, you are the Beloved of the Gods. As the Beloved of the Gods, you are the Priyadarshi Raja to all your people.''

Upagupta ''Rajan! As the Priyadarshi Raja you will now embark upon a career of Dharma. It will be a long journey of life in the service of the Lord and His children on earth.''

Asoka ''What have I to do first?''

Upagupta ''To begin your *Dharma Yatra* ! you have to visit the places where Buddha Tathagata was born, where He got Enlightenment, where He performed the *Dharma-Chakra Pravartana*, and where He attained *Parinirvana*. In all these places, you have to preach to the people the gospels

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of morality as given by Buddha. For the people it will be the *Dharma-Shravana*. Other great duties will follow in due course.''

Asoka ''Holy Savant! How long have I to wait to become a Bhikshu?''

Upagupta ''Devanam Priya! As you go ahead on your path, there will come a time when the Blessings of Buddha will turn you a Bhikshu.''

People shout ''Jayatu Devanam Priya Priyadarshi Asoka.''

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Episode Forty-Two

Commentary: With his personal transfomration, Asoka attempts to transform the very pattern of monarchy. Instead of going on Vihara Yatra *or pleasure tours, he undertakes* Dharma Yatra *or religious tours. A new era of moral upsurge dawns on the soil of India.*

Scene 1

Kapilavastu **Asoka, Upagupta, Karuvaki, Others**

Asoka, accompanied by Upagupta and Karuvaki, reaches the ancient city of Kapilvastu. The ruined city presents dreary and desolate spectacles with fallen palaces and houses, covered with shrubs and wild vegetation. Upagupta leads Asoka through an impassable narrow road towards the crumbled structures of King Suddhodana's palace.

Upagupta "Devanam Priya! This was the majestic palace of Raja Suddhodana who was the chief of the Kshatriya Sakya race of Kapilavastu. Here lived the Queen Maya Devi unto whose womb descended the Bodhisattva from the highest Heavens to be born as her son."

Upagupta, Asoka and Karuvaki kneel down before the palace.

Karuvaki "Your Holiness! The Priyadarshi Raja may kindly be taken to the Garden of Lumbini where Maya Devi gave birth to her son Gautama."

Upagupta "The place is inaccessible, but it is the place to which the Empire will be escorted to fulfil the aim of this *Dharma Yatra.*"

Asoka moves through the ruins of the palace with great emotion and a devotional mind.

Scene 2

Lumbini Garden **Asoka, Upagupta, Karuvaki, Others**

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Through thick jungles of Lumbini, Upagupta takes Asoka and Karuvaki to the place where Gautama was born under a tree. Amidst the chanting of hymns by the monks and nuns, Asoka, Upagupta and Karuvaki prostrate themselves on the sacred site of Buddha's birth. They get up with tears of emotion.

Asoka — "This is the holiest spot on the soil of Bharatavarsha. Here shall I erect a Pillar of the highest order to make the birth place of Buddha ever memorable for all times to come. May generation after generation of my countrymen visit this place to prostrate themselves here for their spiritual awakening."

Karuvaki — "Rajan ! May I be left to myself at this place to meditate and offer prayers till the day is over. I shall return to the monastery only after the sunset."

Upagupta, Asoka and others leave the place as Karuvaki sits down under a tree.

Scene 3

Evening: Lumbini — **Asoka, Karuvaki**

The twilight of the evening descends on the Garden of Lumbini. Karuvaki places a lamp on the spot where Buddha was born. Kneeling down, she sings in sweet melodious voice her songs of prayer.

Standing at a near distance, Asoka observes her sweet face and listens to her song. When Karuvaki stands up, Asoka comes close to her.

Karuvaki (*in surprise*) — "Aryaputra ! I thought I am alone in this jungle of Lumbini at this nightfall."

Asoka — "Do you mind if I also join you to enjoy the bliss of silence and solitude of this sacred place ?"

Karuvaki — "In your presence I hear as if an echo from the great Unknown that Dharmasoka has taken up the cause of Buddha. May the Lord lead you towards the goal He has set before you. Though I may not be here to see your great achievements to come, my mind and heart will ever long to hear of your works to serve the cause of the Faith. From my distant home, I shall ever see in my vision the face of the Devanam Priya Priyadarshi Raja."

Asoka — "Karuvaki ! Have you decided to go back to Kalinga leaving me alone on my new path ?"

Karuvaki — "Aryaputra ! My stay so far has been the most rewarding. I have seen your initiation to the Faith, seen the beginning of your *Dharma Yatra* to

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this holiest of the holy places. Now it is time for me to go back to my countrymen and tell them about Dharmasoka's noble deeds.''

Asoka ''Karuvaki ! You are free to go back at your will. I am nobody to stand on your way. But, I hear within myself - who can be now the companion of my life ! Vidisha Devi has become a Bhikshuni. Asandhimitra is no more. Can Asoka walk alone on the path of life without a companion !''

Karuvaki is stunned.

Karuvaki ''Aryaputra ! The Emperor of Magadh can find any worthy damsel to become his royal consort.''

Asoka ''Yes, a king can find a royal consort most easily. But king Asoka does not need a royal consort. He needs a spiritual companion as his queen. And, to him, none other than the noble Karuvaki can occupy this position !''

Karuvaki feels deeply embarrassed. She looks at Asoka's face with unbelieving eyes.

Karuvaki ''Priyadarshi ! You do not know who Karuvaki is ! I do not come from a royal family of Kalinga to become the queen of Magadh. I do not come from the race of the Kalingan Kshatriyas to become the wife of a Kshatriya monarch. I am the daughter of a humble fisherman. How can I dare to be the queen of the Mauryan Emperor ?''

Asoka ''Darling ! Do not make my heart bleed by your unkind words. Have not you taught me to learn that a Buddhist knows no caste or creed, no race or colour ? Did not the Tathagata teach that all men are equal and same ? Are you not yourself as heroic and brave as any Kshatriya can be ? Do you not hail from a great race of fighters who unite to fight as one people ? Have not your rulers selected you to rear up the boy Aira for the qualities of your head and heart ? Above all, have you not taught me on the Dhauli Hill that the real conquest is the conquest of heart ? What more attributes do I need to embrace you as my wife, as my companion, as my beloved lady, and as my queen ? Are you not the Destiny's choice to be the true Buddhist queen of a Buddhist king ? I have opened my heart to you. It is for you to decide if my heart will break or revive !''

Karuvaki looks at Asoka's eyes expressing love.

Scene 4

Kapilavastu Monastery **Upagupta, Asoka, Karuvaki**

Upagupta hears from Asoka about his desire to marry Karuvaki. He gives his blessings to both.

Upagupta ''It is the Will of Buddha Tathagata that Asoka needs Karuvaki and

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Karuvaki needs Asoka. I invoke the blessings of the Enlightened One for the union of the two souls. May I also advise the Emperor to marry Karuvaki in the Capital in the Vedic way of marriage for the satisfaction of the subjects.''

Asoka and Karuvaki bow their heads.

Scene 5

Palace Courtyard

The marriage ceremony of Asoka and Karuvaki takes place in Pataliputra amidst chanting of the Vedic hymns and Brahmanical rites. The courtiers and nobles attend the ceremony in large number. Marks of discontent, however, are discernible on the face of some of the ministers. Among the women of the palace is seen Tishya Rakshita, with a face burning with malice and anger.

Scene 6

Bodh Gaya **Asoka, Upagupta, Karuvaki, Monks and Nuns**

Accompanied by a large number of monks and nuns, Asoka, Upagupta and queen Karuvaki reach Bodh Gaya to offer worship to the Bodhi Tree.

Upagupta ''Devanam Priya ! Here, at the foot of this Holy Bodhi Tree, Prince Gautama got Enlightenment and became the Buddha. This Tree is venerated and worshipped as symbolic of the wisdom that is the Buddha.''

Asoka, Karuvaki, and all the rest sit down beneath the shade of the Bodhi Tree and chant the hymns. The prayers over, hundreds of monks and nuns line up to the bank of river Niranjana to hand over water pots from hand to hand to pour water at the root of the Tree. Asoka and Karuvaki join the devotees in carrying water pots from the river. At the end of the worship, Upagupta comes to the Emperor.

Upagupta ''The life of this Tree is the concern of every Buddhist of this land. From now on, it also becomes the concern of both of you. Near to this place in a hut lived Princess Sumana with her son Nigrodha. As long as she was here, she poured water at the root of the Tree every morning and evening, offered prayers, and lighted the lamp.''

Karuvaki ''I feel doing the same duty by staying here if only the Emperor permits.''

Asoka ''It is my sacred duty from now on to see that the Tree receives the treatment it deserves. I shall regard the life of this Tree more precious to me than my own life.''

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Among the attendants of the queen is seen a maid who is an agent of Tishya Rakshita. She intently listens to the words of the Emperor.

Scene 7

Toshali **Aira, His Tutor, Messenger from Magadh**

In a small shelter within the ruins of Toshali Fort, boy Aira is being taught by a tutor when a Kalingan messenger from Magadh comes to meet him.

Aira "How is my dear aunt ? When is she coming back ? What message have you brought from her ?"

Messenger "Kumara ! Karuvaki has now become the Queen of King Asoka. She does not live in the monastery of Kukkutarama where I wanted to see her. She now lives in the palace of the Mauryas."

The face of Aira turns red. He tries to keep his emotion in check.

Aira "Friend ! Go back to the palace of Chandasoka on my behalf and put my questions to the queen. Ask her if she could stoop down so low to marry the enemy of her country ! Could she forget that she was the aunt of Aira ! Ask her if the monster Asoka has married her by force ! Ask, if she has been kept a captive for my good conduct ! Ask, if I shall go to rescue her !"

Tutor "Have peace of your mind dear Kumara. I can request the Viceroy Vitasoka on your behalf to call her back. This younger brother of Chandasoka is a noble soul. He is doing his best to help our people."

Aira "All of you may trust the Magadhans, but I cannot. Let my messenger go to my aunt to ascertain directly from her if she has been confined to the palace against her will. Let her also know that if she likes me, she will come back without further delay."

The messenger goes out. Aira sits down to read.

Scene 8

Evening: Palace Garden **Karuvaki, Child Kunala, Tishya, Asoka**

Queen Karuvaki, with little Kunala in her arms, is having her evening walk in the palace garden. Tishya Rakshita comes near to her.

Tishya "Maharani ! The late Queen Asandhimitra must be blessing you from Heaven to see her child in your affectionate care. This future emperor is also lucky to grow up as your own son."

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Karuvaki — "Nice of you to say so. Kunala will be as great a king as his father. Let us pray for his future."

Tishya — "Kunala is no doubt fortunate. But I pity the other boy who is missing you in Kalinga and shedding tears for you. A man from Kalinga met me this morning to say that he is coming from Aira. He wants to see you not in the palace but in the monastery. He seeks your permission as well as wants to know the time."

Karuvaki looks sad.

Karuvaki — "Oh my dear Aira ! How much you may be longing to see me ! Dear Tishya, tell the man to meet me in the monastery tomorrow morning."

Tishya goes away. Asoka appears before Karuvaki.

Asoka — "What makes you look so sad, my darling ! How do I see tears in your eyes ! Did Tishya Rakshita try to cause some pain in your mind. Be aware of her. She is capable of playing mischief even though she is helpful and devoted."

Karuvaki — "Aryaputra ! I like her and regard her as my sister. I am sure, she will never try to cause my pain in my mind. She only came to inform me that Aira has sent a man to me who wants to see me in the monastery."

Asoka — "I can despatch chariots and escorts to bring dear Aira from Toshali !"

Karuvaki — "He will never come. He is too tempestuous a boy to obey my request to come."

Asoka — "In that case, you may yourself go to Toshali and see Aira or even stay with him for as long as he wants. You may also guide Vitasoka to serve the people in the best possible way."

Karuvaki — "How can I leave Kunala who does not want to miss me for a moment ?"

Asoka laughs and takes the child from her arms to his own shoulder.

Asoka — "I am there to see to the comforts of Kunala. You may take the chariot to Toshali at the earliest. Tell Aira that Asoka is like his own uncle to love him as dearly as he loves his own son."

Scene 9

Monastery

Asoka, Upagupta

Before a huge prayer congregation outside the monastery Asoka makes his announcements in the presence of Sannyasi Upagupta.

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Asoka "It is my firm decision to erect thousands of Stupas all over my empire to contain the Holy Relics of Buddha. All these Stupas will be like the temples of worship. Let each Stupa rise to the sky-height to signify the divine glory of the Enlightened One."

Upagupta "Rajan ! For this magnificent and noble enterprise you need numerous Holy Relics. It will be impossible to find so many Relics unless you venture upon a most difficult task. As I know, King Ajatasatru of yore who was a sworn enemy of our Faith, tried to destroy the Holy Relics of the Lord, but failing in his attempts, he buried them under the rocks in the middle of the Ganga where it is humanly impossible to go. If those hidden treasure can be recovered, the Lord's Will will be fulfilled."

Asoka "Give me your blessings to recover the Relics no matter where they are buried and how much strain it may cause. Lead me to the place from where I can see the rocks in the Ganga. With the Grace of the Lord, I shall recover His Relics."

Scene 10

Rocks in the Ganga **Asoka, Monks**

In the middle of the river Ganga stands a solitary rocky hillock, surrounded by wild growths, crocodiles and snakes. Hundreds of monks reach the rocks on boats to do the excavation work. They face invasions from wild crocodiles and poisonous snakes. They lift huge pieces of stones from the grounds around the hillock. They dig through the rocks to go under the dark bottom of the hillock. Singing the hymns and defying dangers, they struggle to reach the huge chests buried under the rocks. From a small boat nearby, Asoka supervises the operation. Huge chests are at last dug up from fathomless depths and lifted to the earth.

Scene 11

Chamber of Ministers **Radhagupta, Ministers**

The council of Ministers meets in the chamber of the Prime Minister to discuss on the affairs of the state.

Radhagupta "The Emperor has taken a disastrous decision to erect 80 thousand massive Stupas throughout the length and the breadth of the empire. It seems, it will drain the treasury for no useful purpose."

1st Minister "It is time to protest. He does not consult the Council of Ministers before taking such drastic decisions. What purpose do we serve as Ministers if the King has no need of us ?"

2nd Minister "We are no longer the King's Ministers. His ministers are now that Buddhist monk Upagupta, that cripple old sinner Yasas, and of course, that Kalingan Queen !"

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Radhagupta "Instead of losing our value, let us act to counteract the King's policies and acts. Some day the tide will ebb. Let the King ride the high tide for the time being."

They talk in whispers for a long time.

Scene 12

The works of construction of huge Stupas are seen at many places. Thousands upon thousands of men are seen on the construction sites. Huge pieces of stones are carried by lines of human beings in endless streams.

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Episode Forty-Three

Commentary: The thought and actions of a Buddhist Asoka cause great concern to the Prime Minister and other Ministers. As Asoka's lavish expenditure on construction works grows to enormous magnitude, a court conspiracy to work against the Emperor.

Scene 1

Toshali **Karuvaki, Vitasoka, Officers**

Queen Karuvaki reaches Toshali and meets the Viceroy Vitasoka in his newly constructed palace. The Prince receives the Queen with honour.

Karuvaki "Kumara ! You have already received the message of the Devanam Priya Raja to be inscribed on the rock of Dhauli that all men are like his children. He further instructs that a set of officers to be known as the *Dharma-Mahamatras* should be appointed for propagation and promotion of the merits of real Dharma -- the eternal laws of virtue -- among the common people. These officers will be like educators of the people and like their guides for the moral and material wellbeing of all. They should also discharge charitable and philanthropic duties and should try to carry a spiritual consciousness to the mind of all men."

Vitasoka "Revered Empress ! The instructions of the Priyadarshi Raja will be faithfully followed."

Karuvaki "May the Kalinga people know that the *Bheri-Ghosha* or the reverberation of the war drum has been abandoned for ever after the Kalinga War. Instead, King Asoka has adopted the practice of *Dharma-Ghosha* or the reverberation of the Dharma or the Laws of Righteousness. The aim of this new policy is to conquer others by the force of love."

Vitasoka and Officers bow their heads before the Queen.

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Prince Vitasoka with an Old Hermit in a Forest

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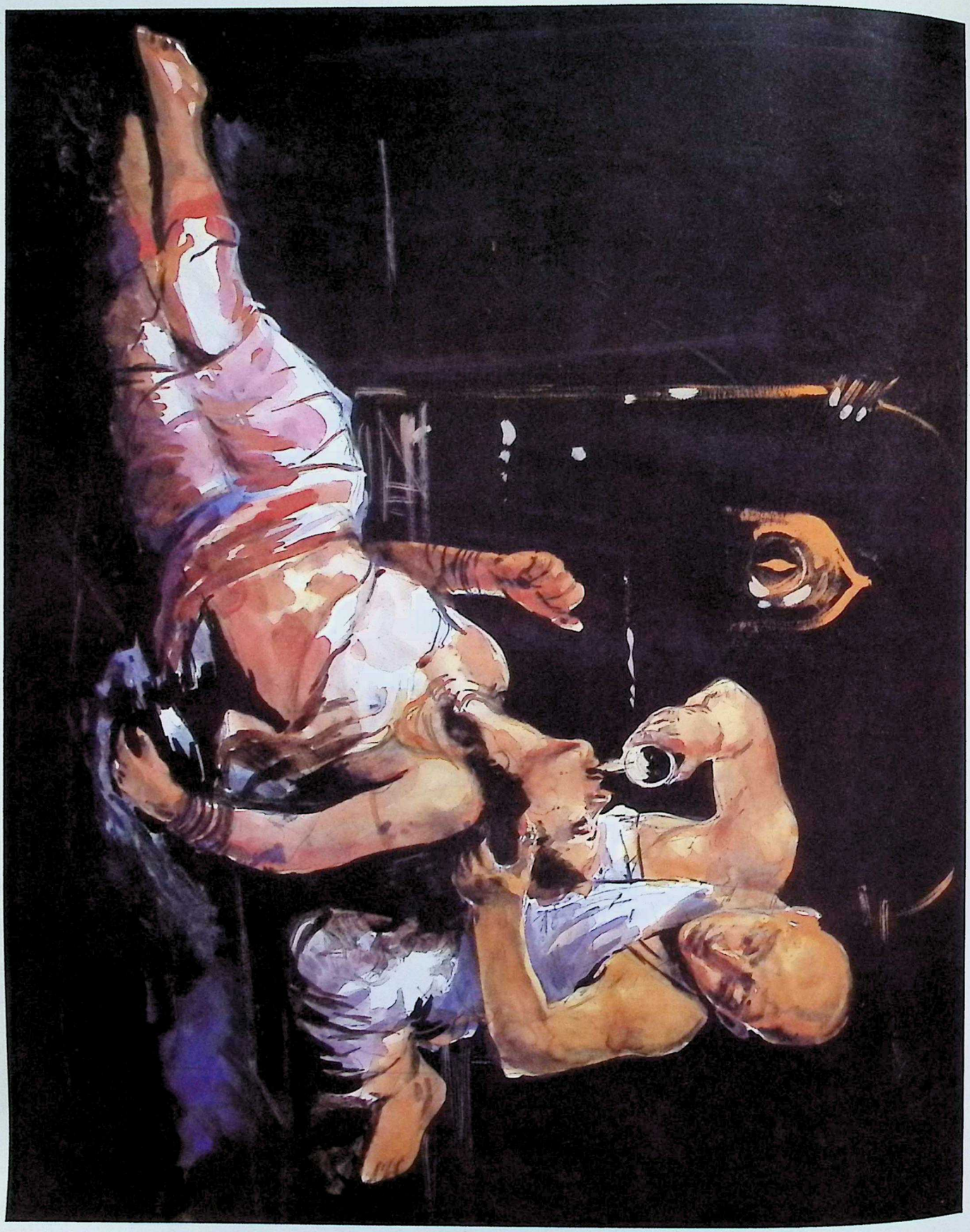

Sannyasi Upagupta Nursing a Dying Basavadatta

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Princess Sanghamitra Going to Sinhala with a Sapling of the Bodhi Tree

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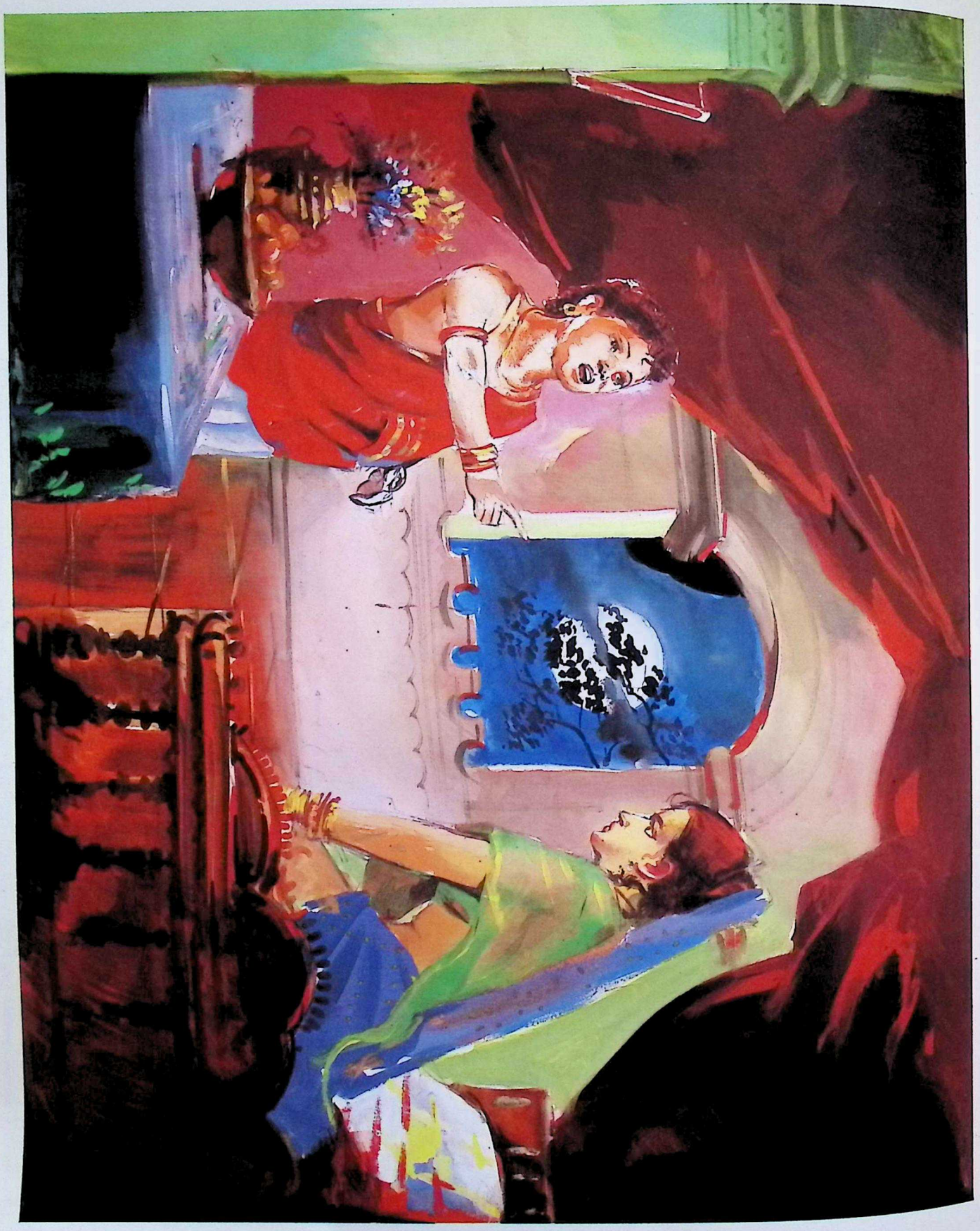

Prince Kunala Rebuking Tishya Rakshita for Her Lustful Desires

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Scene 2

Toshali Fort: Interior **Karuvaki, Aira**

Insides the ruins of Toshali Fort, Karuvaki meets Aira in his shelter in the night. Aira expresses both emotion and anger. Karuvaki embraces the boy.

Karuvaki "My dear Aira ! How much have I not missed you in these long long days !"

Aira "You have missed me for ever and I too have lost you for my whole life. This is the game of fate. A dear one of yesterday may turn out a stranger or foreigner of today."

Karuvaki "No, dear, no. I am for ever for you."

Aira "Are you not now the queen of the king who fought against our people and our country ? To me, therefore, you are a changed person. On the other hand, Aira remains the same. I shall ever regard your king as my enemy."

Karuvaki "Aira ! Did you not see how your dear land Kalinga changed a Chandasoka to a Dharmasoka ! Do you not see how he has renounced war for all time to come ! Do you not see how he is determined to preach peace and non-violence everywhere because of the violence he committed here ! It is for these reasons that I decided to remain with him to help him in his new role. Will not my people forgive me for becoming the queen of Asoka for the cause of humanity ? I hope, they will, and you too."

Aira stands calm and thoughtful.

Aira "Aunt ! We know you and realise that you are with Asoka for a noble purpose. I would request you to go back to your husband soon to help him in his mission. As for myself, I shall keep you in my mind, and shall long to see you again and again."

Karuvaki "Will you not come to Pataliputra to see Asoka who will shower his affection on you as much as I do ?"

Aira (*laughing*) "Oh, no, never. Asoka might have conquered your heart, but he can never win over Aira."

Karuvaki embraces the boy.

Scene 3

Sarnath

Asoka, Karuvaki, Kunala, Others

Asoka with Karuvaki and little Kunala comes to Sarnath to supervise the construction of the magnificent Stupa there. Thousands of workers under the guidance of able architects carry on the construction work.

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Karuvaki "Here at Sarnath the Enlightened One performed the *Dharma-Chakra Pravartana*. May this Stupa carry in its majestic and magnificent appearance the symbolic meaning of that great work of the Lord -- the Turning of the Eternal Wheel of Law."

Asoka "The works of construction have begun all over the land. Along with the Stupas will rise the Stambhas with *Dharmalipis* all over my empire. On hundreds of rocks shall I inscribe the laws of mortality and ethics for all men to read and know the real virtues of life. I shall have no rest. Let my years be devoted to the cause of man's moral and spiritual elevation."

The Cycle of Times turns round several times as the Stupa of Sarnath appears in its complete form, imposing and stupendous. Child Kunala is seen as a handsome teenager.

Scene 4

Chamber of Ministers **Radhagupta, Ministers**

Radhagupta and Ministers meet in their chamber with a determined mind to oppose the King.

Radhagupta "Time is running out, but yet we are helpless to prevent the Emperor from his reckless actions. He is all out to spread Buddhism. His fanciful constructions have exhausted the treasury. The priests and Brahmins feel restless. They are annoyed against the Ministers for our inaction against the King. I seek your advice if we shall play a positive role or shall suffer in silence the whims of a frenzied King."

1st Minister "The Brahmanical discontent may soon take a dangerous turn."

2nd Minister "What can a non-violent Emperor do if they revolt everywhere against his extreme favour to Buddhists ?"

3rd Minister "The Emperor's continuous absence from the capital has brought the day-to-day administration to a pathetic halt. Since nobody can stop him from going out on *Dharma-Yatras*, let us request him to appoint a Vice-Gerent to look after the affairs of the government."

Radhagupta presents a cunning smile.

Radhagupta "I find a way out to check the Emperor. I can prevail upon him to appoint Prince Vitasoka as the Vice-Gerent and can work upon the Vice-Gerent to oppose the policies of the Emperor. It may serve our purpose if we can play the game well."

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Scene 5

Asoka's Room **Asoka, Karuvaki, Vitasoka**

Summoned back from Kalinga, Prince Vitasoka meets Asoka and Karuvaki and hears about his new appointment.

Asoka "Vitasoka ! I have summoned you back from Kalinga since that country is now in perfect peace. I congratulate you for your noble deeds to pacify the people of that land."

Vitasoka "If Kalinga is in peace, it is because of Karuvaki. Because of her presence with you as the Empress of Magadh, the people there feel happy and reassured about your intentions for their wellbeing. She deserves the real congratulation, not I."

Asoka (*smiling*) "Of course, it is for her that the Kalingan leaders and the people have accepted me as their own. She may visit her homeland as often as she pleases. At the moment, I have brought you back from there to appoint you as my Vice-Gerent in Pataliputra. This is also the desire of the Council of Ministers."

Vitasoka "I obey your order. But who will be in charge of Kalinga ?"

Karuvaki "If the Emperor permits, I may go to Kalinga for a longer period to organise the Buddhist Sangha. In that case, anybody can go there as the Viceroy, and I shall work as his adviser."

Asoka "I am to accept your suggestion. I may miss you, but no separation is painful when it is for a great cause."

Scene 6

Vitasoka's Apartment **Vitasoka, Radhagupta**

Radhagupta meets the Vice-Gerent to work out his strategy against Asoka.

Radhagupta "Everyone of the Council of Ministers is delighted for your appointment to the august office. We had to convince the Emperor that without you as the Vice-Gerent to look after the administration, we the Ministers are unable to function. He agreed, and we are happy."

Vitasoka "Mahamantri ! I seek your guidance to conduct myself well and to prove myself worthy of the heavy responsibility."

Radhagupta pretends to look grave, as if overwhelmed by worries and anxieties.

Radhagupta "It is my solemn duty to apprise you of the current situation. Unpleasant to say so, but yet I have to say that I visualise a storm on the horizon."

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Vitasoka "Storm ! What for !"

Radhagupta "Aryaputra ! Does Bharatavarsha belong only to the Buddhists ? Is the immense wealth of the land meant only for the Sangha ? If countless Stupas and monuments are erected for the Buddhists, will not the Brahmans deserve some temples for their gods ? Can we prevent a Brahmanical revolt of the wildest character against a Buddhist Emperor ? We could have faced any unrest from any section of people earlier, but certainly not now. Because, we cannot suppress or kill the rebels under the new dispensation. Everybody knows that the Emperor stands for non-violence !"

Vitasoka "It is indeed alarming to hear this. How can I face the situation as the Vice-gerent ?"

Radhagupta "To speak frankly and boldly, while your elder works as a Buddhist missionary, you as the younger should have to rule as the real Emperor. Asoka cannot be both a ruling monarch and a preaching Buddhist. Kindly think over it. Time is running out."

Vitasoka "Mahamantri ! My brother is the Emperor, and I am his Vice-gerent to work out his policies and carry out his wishes. Will it not be too much for me either to oppose his actions or to give up his principles ?"

Radhagupta (*in stern voice*) "Kumara Upraja ! The option is clear for you. You have to choose between your brother and your ancestors ! Did Chandragupta Maurya build his empire only to be destroyed by his grandson Asoka ? Please choose between the momentary peace of the time and permanent stability for all times. Weigh between Sannyasi Upagupta who is the mentor of your brother and all the ministers and priests on the other side of the scale. Please also weigh between the non-violence of a Buddhist and the violence of the State for its self-preservation ! For you, it is not the question of being an younger brother to bow down before the elder brother in reverence. It is a question of your loyalty to your ancestors as well as your duty to your future successors."

Vitasoka looks nervous. But soon he regains self-confidence.

Vitasoka "I fathom the depth of your emotion in the interest of the empire. I think, I have to assert myself in the name of Chandragupta Maurya and Bindusara Amitraghata. I shall revert to the traditional monarchy slowly but steadily. My brother has given up the *Vihara-Yatra* of the kings. I shall revive it and go on hunting expeditions for my pleasure. Let me see, how the Emperor reacts to it."

Radhagupta "May the Gods bless our Vice-Gerent. No matter what comes, we the ministers shall stand behind our new master for the sake of the Mauryan Bharat !"

Radhagupta gets up, bows down and goes out.

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Scene 7

Forest **Vitasoka, Escorts**

Vitasoka with a number of horsemen goes to dense forest for hunting. As they ride after the deers and animals, they set separated from each other. Vitasoka's horse runs faster and disappears from the eyes of others.

1st Soldier "The Kumara should not have driven his horse so recklessly. How can we trace him out when darkness falls ?"

2nd Soldier "Let us blow trumpets so that he may know of our location".

Before they blow trumpets, they find roaring lions coming out of their dens at a near distance. The soldiers fail to control their horses as the animals turn back and ride for life in seeing the lions.

Scene 8

Forest Hut **Vitasoka, Hermit**

Having lost his way in the forest, a tired and fatigued Vitasoka comes to a small hut of a hermit to beg for shelter for the night. The hermit, old and skeletal, takes the Prince inside his hut to offer shelter. Vitasoka spreads his body on the floor. Very near to him sits the old monk, looking like a ghost of a man.

Vitasoka "Is there anything to eat in your hermitage ?"

Monk "Look at my body. I have not eaten anything for the last two days. What can you therefore expect to eat in this starving hermit's hut ?"

Vitasoka "If you can live without food for two days, I can certainly live without eating for this single night. But, don't you feel hungry when you have no food ?"

Monk "Friend ! Don't you count my bones on the chest, visible through thin dry skin ? I do not eat even for days together. I have overcome hunger. A hermit knows no appetite."

Vitasoka "Wonderful indeed ! But do you have sleep in the night without having food in your stomach ?"

Monk "It does not matter whether sleep comes or not. I have overcome the feeling of sleeplessness."

Vitasoka "What about feeling cold and heat ? Don't you shiver in winter without clothes on your body ? Don't you feel the heat of the summer when the

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sun is unkind to man ?

Monk (*laughing*) "Winter or summer, strong winds or showers do not cause any pain to my body. I am above these small games of Nature !"

Vitasoka "Would you mind if I ask you my last question which is dirty and vulgar ?"

Monk "There is nothing to mind. For any dirty question you will have my truthful answer."

Vitasoka "Excuse me for asking a viceful question to a holy man. Do you at any time feel urge for sex ? Of course, with a body without flesh you can never have sexual appetite. Yet I feel curious to know if you do."

Monk (*laughing*) "To speak the truth, sexual appetite comes from one's mental desire for sex. I have no such desire myself because my mind knows that sex is sin for a monk. But, a man being what he is, I feel the sexual urge whenever I see the animals and creatures indulging in their sex-play. You see, even the smallest of creatures possess appetite for sex. It is the Nature's game. No matter whether one is old or weak, hungry or helpless, householder or sannyasi, the urge for sex can rise in him."

Vitasoka "So, even at this age and with this body, you suffer from sex-desire, as you say. This being so, what is expected of the youthful monks with robust bodies and sound health ? Do they not suffer from stronger sexual urge and most often in their youth ?"

Monk "If you ask so, I may give the answer that no creature on earth can be above the laws of Nature. Sex is a natural instinct, necessary perhaps for the preservation of all species created by God. Like the urge for food and water, there is also the urge for sex in every man and woman. You ask about youthful monks. Well, think of the great *rishi* Vishamitra. Did he not come under sexual urge even in midst of meditation when his eyes fell on the heavenly beauty of Menaka? Why should you then blame the poor monks on earth ?"

Vitasoka "Holy Man ! I am fully satisified to hear your words. I pay my homage to you for the truth you have spoken. I shall enjoy the peace of mind while spending the night in your hermitage."

A tired Vitasoka closes his eyes and falls asleep. Deep darkness of night gathers over the place.

Scene 9

Palace Garden **Asoka, Vitasoka, Yasas**

In the beautiful garden of the Maurya palace, Asoka, Yasas and Vitasoka are enjoying an evening walk while having casual discussion on trivial things.

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Yasas "Rajan ! The Vice-Gerent narrated to me the story of his experiences with an old monk in the forest. As he says, after hearing that monk, he has developed serious doubts about the character of our monks and nuns."

Asoka (*in surprise*) "Doubts on the character of monks and nuns ! Has my brother lost his mind?"

Asoka stops walking and looks to Vitasoka.

Vitasoka "Yes, I have sufficient reasons for my doubt. These youthful monks and nuns are not above the natural human weaknesses in respect of sexual urge and sex-enjoyment. Even the tiniest of the living creatures is not above its sexual desire. How can these countless young men and women give up their natural urge for sexual intercourse ? Despite their devotion or meditation, faith in spiritual disciplines, they must be indulging in sex secretly. I seek forgiveness for saying so. But, I suspect the young monks and nuns, living nearer to each other in our countless Sanghas, in respect of their personal purity."

Asoka feels greatly surprised to hear the words of Vitasoka.

Asoka "Is your mind being poisoned by the enemies of the Sangha ? If you start suspecting the very character of our men and women, you can never be sincere in your approach towards the Buddhist Order and my policies towards the Sangha !"

Vitasoka "Revered Brother ! In your extreme goodness, you have taken the entire community of monks and nuns to your solemn trust. But as your humble younger, I deemed it necessary to open my mind to you so that you may reconsider your opinion of them."

Vitasoka goes away. Asoka looks to Yasas with a sad face.

Asoka "Yasas ! I feel disturbed to think of Vitasoka's attitude towards the Buddhists. His ideas will work like poison ! How can I remove the doubts from his mind?"

Yasas (*smiling*) "I think, Prince needs a sound spiritual lesson to come out from his illusions about sex vis a vis austere life of the Bhikshus and Bhikshunis. Let me try to bring him to his senses. The way be spoke shows that he is being influenced by evil minds. Nothing is impossible!"

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Episode Forty-Four

Commentary: Prince Vitasoka, instead of coming forward to oppose Asoka, himself becomes a Bhikshu. Asoka's role as a missionary-monarch results in the rapid spread of Buddhism.

Scene 1

Night:Pleasure House **Vitasoka, Friends, Agents of Yasas**

Vitasoka comes to the Pleasure House of the Mauryan Princes with his friends to spend the night. The house, situated on the bank of the Ganga, is a place of delight and enjoyment. Vitasoka and his friends are seen playing the game of Satranj. *Two dancing girls move around to encourage the players. They offer wine to the Prince and others as the game goes on. Two agents of Yasas take active part in the game. Among the friends of the Vice-Gerent are two Courtiers who, while playing, begin to discuss random issues.*

1st Courtier "The intelligence of a prince is best known from his intelligent shifting of the pawns on the board of the *Satranj*. I am sure, nobody can excell our Vice-Gerent in this art."

2nd Courtier "Politics is also a game of chess. We hope, one day Prince Vitasoka will reach the throne to become the emperor of Magadh."

Other friends clap and cheer.

Yasas' Agent "People want it. They feel disgusted with the ways of the present king."

2nd Agent "Why not we support the Prince to capture the throne ! It is not a difficult work."

Vitasoka, who is drinking profusely, expresses apprehension as well as satisfaction.

1st Courtier "We may work out a conspiracy once the Prince gives us his permission."

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Yasas' Agent "I can easily assassinate the Emperor if the Vice-Gerent nods his head to signify consent !"

Cheers from the drunken courtiers.

Vitasoka "May the dancers present their performance. It is going to be mid-night."

The girls start dancing around the Prince and the drunken courtiers. The agents of Yasas escape secretly.

Scene 2

At the Gate **Vitasoka, Courtiers, Soldiers**

It is late in the night when Prince Vitasoka with his friends come out of the Pleasure House. As they step out, some soldiers under a captain surround them.

Captain "Aryaputra ! You and your friends are now under arrest. We are duty bound to take you to the prison."

Vitasoka looks perplexed and confused.

Vitasoka "Are you aware whom are you talking with ? Are you not afraid of you life ?"

Captain "Your Honour ! You and your friends gathered here to hatch a plot against His Majesty the Emperor. You talked of assassinating the King. We have no other alternative but to take you to prison."

Vitasoka stands dumb-founded. The soldiers lead him and his friends to a chariot.

Scene 3

Emperor's Audience Hall **Asoka, Officers, Vitasoka, Captives, Captain, Soldiers**

Asoka, attended by some officers of the state, is conducting administration and supervising justice as the supreme judge. Vitasoka and other captives are brought to his presence for trial on charges of conspiracy against the monarch. The Prince looks crestfallen and downcast. The chief prosecutor seeks permission to present his case.

Prosecutor "Your Majesty ! A dangerous plot was being hatched in the Pleasure House of the Vice-Gerent secretly in the dark hours of the previous night. The conspirators discussed about a coup to overthrow the Emperor. Witnesses are here to testify the truth."

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Asoka expresses pretended surprise.

Asoka "Can I believe this that my own dear younger brother who is working as my Vice--Gerent could think of dethroning me ! Is the thirst for power so dangerous to deprave a human being to such extents ?"

Prosecutor "Your Majesty ! As the witnesses say, the conspirators talked of the assassination of the holy person of the Emperor."

Asoka (*looking very grave*) "Produce the witnesses."

The prosecutor presents the two witnesses who are the agents of Yasas before the Emperor.

1st Witness "Your Majesty ! I swear in the name of God that the friends of the Prince talked of how to make him the Emperor."

2nd Witness "I swear by Gods that they talked of putting an end to Your Majesty's life in order to raise the Vice-Gerent to the throne."

Asoka looks grim and terrible while focusing sharp eyes on Vitasoka's face.

Vitasoka (*in fearful voice*) "Your Majesty ! I have heard their discussion about making me the Emperor and also of the talk of assassinating your august person."

Asoka "Did you raise your voice of protest when they were talking of killing your King ?"

Vitasoka "I did not. I plead guilty."

Asoka "The Mauryan Law is clear in this respect. Whosoever entertains any evil thought against the King deserves death. There is no discrimination between a king's brother and a common criminal. Conspiracy against the government is the worst of the crimes in the Mauryan code. Since you are the centre of the conspiracy which took shape in your presence and within your knowledge, as well as with your consent, I pronounce on you the sentence of death."

Prosecutor "Your Majesty ! I beseech that the Prince be forgiven. He has confessed his guilt and is in a mood of repentance."

Asoka "I cannot go against the Laws of the Land. At the best, I can spare his life for 10 days from today. And, also, I can do him a favour. Since he wanted to be the king, let him be a king for these ten days before his execution. Let his earthly ambition to sit on the throne be fulfilled. For these ten days I shall go into oblivion so that he can work as the Emperor of Magadh and enjoy absolute power and glory."

Asoka gets up from his throne and goes out.

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Scene 4

Palace: Vitasoka's Room **Vitasoka, Dharma, Maid**

A desperate Vitasoka is walking from corner to corner in his gorgeously decorated living room. He breathes heavily and feels restless. His old mother, Queen Dharma, comes to his room.

Dharma "My dear son ! Why did the Gods curse you to this fate ! Let Asoka return to the palace. I shall weep before him as a mother to give me back my son's life."

Dharma bursts into weeping.

Vitasoka (*in choking voice*) "Maa ! Let your Vitasoka suffer his *karma* from which there is no escape. Don't beg for my life from by brother."

A maid comes in with a gold dish in her hand containing delicious food and drink.

Vitasoka "Take away the food. Who can eat and drink to enjoy food when the axe of the executioner hangs before his eyes ! Get away at once."

The maid goes out. Vitasoka bows at the feet of his mother.

Vitasoka "Do have mercy on me and go back to your room. Let me think of death till the day of execution in order to overcome the fear of death. Bless me to think of the *Moksha.* May my soul realise the futility of his earthly existence, may it realise the illusions of life, and may it prepare for the journey from unreal to the real, from darkness to light, and from death to salvation. The Emperor has done me the greatest favour by giving me full ten days to live and search for the inner happiness before escaping the miseries of life."

Dharma goes out weeping. Vitasoka lies down on his magnificent bed. He gets up. He lies down again and closes his eyes. Feeling restless he comes down to the floor and sits cross-legged as if in meditation.

Scene 5

Same Place: Next Day **Vitasoka, Minister**

A Minister comes to the room of the Prince the next day for royal orders.

Vitasoka "On Heaven's sake, please go out of my sight. I am not your emperor. I am a condemned prisoner, awaiting execution. Never come to me again. Go to the Prime Minister."

The Minister escapes quickly.

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Scene 6

Night: Three Days Later **Vitasoka, Maid, Beautiful Girl**

A maid carries food and drink to the room of the Prince in the night of the third day of his captivity.

Maid "Your Majesty ! Your mother has sent an appeal to you that if you do not eat your meal this night and every day, she will starve herself to death. In fact, she has not taken any food for the last three days. Her condition is getting worse. She will break her fast only if you take your food here and now. All are waiting for my return from your room. I pray, please pity your old mother at least by drinking this pot of milk which she has sent for you."

Vitasoka gets up fearfully, eats a morsel of food and drinks a potful of milk.

Vitasoka "Go, and tell my dear mother that I have taken food. Yes, I have to survive till the day of my execution. I am the Emperor of Magadh, the Chakravarti Monarch ! How can I starve to die !"

He laughs aloud in a hysterical manner. The maid leaves the room. A beautiful young girl in gorgeous dress comes in and closes the door from inside.

Vitasoka "What for are you here in this part of the night ?"

Girl "Your Majesty ! You are the king of kings. I have come to entertain you as customary with the kings. My body, my flesh and my everything are now at your disposal."

She comes very near to the bed and begins to unrobe herself, presenting enchanting smiles.

Vitasoka "Have you come to play a cruel joke with me with your appeals for sex ?"

Girl "Never, Your Majesty. I have come for the sake of your pleasure. I offer my charm and beauty to you for your enjoyment."

Vitasoka "Darling ! Can you imagine what I find in your charm and beauty ? I see beneath your thin skin nothing but dirt and filth of the worst kind. Still beneath that I find a horrible looking skeleton. I see in your beauty what Prince Gautama saw in the bodies of the sleeping beauties in the palace of Kapilavastu while lying dishevelled and disarrayed. Is not your beautiful body a leather bag containing most impure objects of foul smell, offensive to the senses ? Is not your beauty a deception, a fake and momentary apperance? Do you know, my sister, how would you look when diseased or old ? Please go from my sight so that I may not see in my inner eyes what does your beauty and body contain. Go to those fools

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who go mad to see the beauties of body and flesh with their outward eyes.''

Vitasoka points his finger at the door. The embarrassed girl goes out in a moment.

Scene 7

Day: Same **Vitasoka, Guard, Asoka, Yasas**

With heaps of holy scriptures on either side, Vitasoka is sitting in meditation on the tenth day of his ordeal. His body looks much reduced, but face appears bright and fresh. A guard enters his room. As Vitasoka sees him, he gets up with a graceful face.

Vitasoka ''Is the executioner waiting outside to take me to the scaffold ? Tell him to come in. I am ready. This day is the happiest day of my life.''

Guard ''His Majesty the Emperor wants to see you.''

Vitasoka ''Oh my dear brother ! How happy do I feel at the moment on the eve of my journey across ! How much happy shall I feel to bid you farewell !''

Asoka and Yasas come in. Vitasoka bows down to take dust from Asoka's feet with a smiling face.

Asoka ''How are you now, Vitasoka ?''

Vitasoka ''In a perfectly blissful state of mind, revered brother.''

Asoka ''How?''

Vitasoka ''Realising the truth of my impending journey from here to there: '*Asoda Ma Sadgamaya, Tamosa Ma Jyotirgamaya, Mrityam Ma Amritam Gamaya*' -- that is the journey from the Unreal to the Real, from Darkness to Light, from Death to Immortality that I attained a state of perfect peace.''

Asoka ''How did you feel like all these days ?''

Vitasoka ''Every moment I felt a touch of death. I overcame this by the thought of salvation. By my eagerness to escape the sorrows of existence, I realised the bliss of emancipation. Like Nigrodha who saw no distinction between life and death and who offered himself to die, I too am ready for the scaffold with utmost happiness. Revered brother, give me your blessings to depart with a smile.''

Asoka ''Why did you starve yourself to reduce your body ? You were the Emperor ! You could have enjoyed your life to the maximum limit !''

Vitasoka (*smiling*) ''Can there be appetite for food or pleasure with death in your presence ?''

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Asoka "Did you not feel any urge for sexual satisfaction when the choicest beauties were at your disposal ?"

Vitasoka "Revered Brother ! When one gives up all attachment to this body, and when one looks inwardly to his soul, can there be any desire for sex ? In my inner eyes I saw the beauties in their ugliest form, obscene and repulsive."

Asoka comes near to Vitasoka and embraces him with deep affection.

Asoka "Dear Vitasoka ! You have successfully passed your examination. I arranged this ordeal for you to teach you a lesson. You have now realised how one feels in the thought of death, the only Reality to end the illusions of existence. You suspected our monks and nuns that they are not above their sexual urge appetite ! Now you can believe that these monks and nuns who regard this life as a means to salvation, who are conscious of the *karmic* results, who have renounced the earthly pleasures and desires, who live by begging for a morsel of food to sustain life, can seldom come under an urge for sex. What you have felt in these brief ten days, they feel the same from their initiation to the Faith till their death."

Overwhelmed by emotion, Vitasoka touches the feet of Asoka and gets up with tears rolling down his cheek.

Vitasoka "Brother ! You have opened my eyes, you have also to open my path to salvation. Allow me to turn a Bhikshu. As for yourself, you are already a supreme Bhikshu in your inner self. But for the sake of the empire and its humanity, you have to play your role as a king till at least Kunala attains manhood. But as for me, I am reborn after your order of execution to enter into a new life."

Asoka places his hand on the head of Vitasoka.

Scene 8

Monastery **Upagupta, Asoka**

Asoka comes to the monastery to meet Sannyasi Upagupta and receive instructions from him about the future course of action in the cause of Buddhism.

Upagupta "Devanam Priya ! The time has at last dawned when you should begin your *Dharma-Vijaya*, that is, the conquest of this world by the Universal Law of Love, Peace and Righteousness. This will be like a supreme ordeal for you when you have to give up all your attachment towards your nearest and dearest ones. You have to send your son Mahindra, daughter Sanghamitra, wife Karuvaki and brother Vitasoka to farthest and innermost places of inaccessible regions of Bharat, as well as to the

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lands across the deep seas and high mountains to preach the message of the Sakyamuni. If and when your own kith and kin undertake the arduous journeys to propagate the Faith, hundreds of Bhikshus and missionaries will follow their examples to go out to enlighten the humanity with the gospels of love and peace. Priydarshi ! The time has come for your *Dharma-Vijaya*. This seems to be the Will of the Lord.''

Asoka — ''This humble disciple is ready to carry out your desire. May my dearest son and daughter be the first Buddhists to brave the seas and reach the shores of the Island of Lanka on their mission to convert the people of that island-country. I have heard from the merchants of Kalinga that the King of Simhala is eager to receive our preachers.''

Upagupta — ''Rajan ! Never in the coming ages will a king send his own son and daughter outside the frontiers of his domain as you are going to do today. The Eternal Buddha will give you the courage.''

Upagupta gets up to go for his work of preaching among the commonest people of the capital.

Scene 9

Night : Street of Pataliputra — **Upagupta**

It is a fullmoon night, Sannyasi Upagupta is walking along on the deserted street of Pataliputra while on his way back from the houses of the downtrodden. As he walks fast, an agonising cry from nearby house reaches his ears. He stops and listens and next proceeds to the gate of the house.

Scene 10

Basvadatta's House — **Basavadatta, Upagupta**

Inside her bedroom Basavadatta is lying on the floor and struggling against death. With her body rotten and swollen, she is abandoned to her fate for her vicious disease which is loathful to see. Upagupta enters into her room and finds her lying in the dim light of an earthen lamp. He sits down on the floor and lifts her head to his own lap. He tries to wipe out the foul liquid flowing out of her boils.

Basavadatta opens her eyes and finds the face of Upagupta over her own face. She tries to utter her words with great difficulty.

Basavadatta — ''I can recognise you. You are Sannyasi Upagupta. I am Basavadatta whom you can neither recognise nor remember. One night you refused to come to my house when I wanted you with me. You had said then, you will come some other day. And, today is that some other day when this dirty prostitute is dying of her vices.''

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She sobs while looking to the eyes of the Sannyasi.

Upagupta "Sister ! Forget what you were. Forget the days or nights that have gone. This moment, think of the day that is to dawn."

Upagupta pours water in her mouth from a pot.

Basavada: "Sannyasi ! Would you not give me mercy and initiate me before I die ?"

She looks with pathetic eyes. Upagupta utters the words "Buddham Saranam Gachchhami". Basavadatta tries to repeat the words while breathing her last.

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Episode Forty-Five

Commentary: Asoka's Dharma-Vijaya *begins in a way, unprecedented in human history. He sends his son Mahindra and daughter Sanghamitra to the Island of Simhala to preach the Religion of Buddha.*

Scene 1

Palace of Simhala King **King Tissa, Ministers**

The King of Simhala, Tissa, is having consultations with some of his ministers about the mission to be sent to the Court of Asoka.

Tissa " We are all aware that the land of Bharatavarsha is now blessed with a great king who is himself preaching the doctrines of the Sakyamuni Buddha.We hear from the Kalinga traders unbelievable stories about King Asoka -- how he fought the most inhuman war in that land, and how he got transformed into a most pious king. He is now out to transform the character of his people by preaching to them the highest doctrines of spirituality. The whole of Bharat is at present undergoing a spiritual and moral upsurge because of the activities of King Asoka. Dear Ministers! I feel inspired to conduct myself as does the King of Bharat!"

1st Minister "Your Majesty! We are delighted to hear about your desire to follow the footprints of King Asoka. But before you act as he does, it is necessary for you to be initiated to the Faith like King Asoka who was initiated by Sannyasi Upagupta."

2nd Minister "Faith and religions have no frontiers. Our Island Kingdom may embrace the Faith of the Buddha for the good of the people if only we find a spiritual person of the highest order to initiate us to the Faith."

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Tissa " I am happy to hear this. I am prepared to send my royal emissaries to King Asoka with a request to send a great preacher to our country."

1st Minister " May King Asoka know that ever since Prince Vijaya came from the shores of Simhapura in Bharat to this Island with his Aryan followers and established his kingdom of Simhala, the people of this Island have received from Bharat the spiritual inspiration to conduct their life. Prince Vijaya came to Simhala at the time of the death of Buddha. It is now time after this long gap that the religion of Buddha also come to this land for the moral and spiritual wellbeing of our people."

'King Tissa and Ministers express hope and delight at the prospect of their good-will mission to Asoka.

Scene 2

Sanchi: Monastery **Asoka, Emissaries from Simhala,Devi, Mahindra, Sanghamitra**

Asoka arrives in the Buddhist monastery at Sanchi with the emissaries from Simhala with him. He is received by his wife Devi and son and daughter , and taken to a waiting congregation of Bhikshus and nuns. Sitting on a wooden chair Asoka faces the congregation.

Asoka "Revered Bhikshus! I come to you as a *Bhikshu-Gatika* to beg of you a precious soul of your noble order. I have received a request from my noble friend King Tissa of Simhala to send to his Island Kingdom a Bhikshu in order to initiate the King and his people to the religion of the Sakyamuni. I am conscious of the trials and tribulation, of dangers and difficulties associated with such a journey across the seas and far from our land. But, one has to suffer in the service of the Master. A time has come when the humanity outside Bharat will be enlightened with the gospels of the Enlightened One. A time has come when the great Bhikshus of the Buddhist Order should have to go to distant countries such as Lanka, Brahma, Siam, Kamboja, and other territories of the eastern hemisphere.Holy Monks! May I now pray to you to spare one of your celebrated preachers who can go to Simhala where the King and the people are ready to embrace the Faith!"

A total silence overtakes the congregation. Senior Bhikshus look at each other with fearful eyes.Asoka turns his eyes from face to face to observe reaction to his appeal. Suddenly stands up Mahindra to draw Asoka's attention.

Mahindra "Revered Father! I offer myself to undertake this journey to our sister land of Simhala. May the noble emissaries from King Tissa go back to inform him that Bhikshu Mahindra will soon reach his kingdom to perform the Will of the Lord."

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All are amazed to hear the announcement of Mahindra. Devi's eyes turn tearful. Asoka observes her sadness.

Asoka — "My son! No prince on earth has done before or will do in future what you have done or are going to do. Born to become a Chakravarti Emperor, you are a Bhikshu by your will. Of your own, you renounced a throne and an empire. At the instance of your father you are now going to leave your motherland. My heart is delighted at your decision, but I see tears in the eyes of your beloved mother.Will you then still stand resolved to leave your mother and the motherland!"

Mahindra — "It is my mother who has taught me the lessons of sacrifice for the cause of mankind. In separation from her, I shall only be performing her inner wishes."

Sanghamitra — "Father! Who will go to preach the Faith to the women of Simhala if not your daughter in garb of a Bhikshuni? Will you not give me your blessings to join my brother?"

Asoka' eyes glisten with tears as he hears the words of Samghamitra.

Asoka — "My daughter! May be, you too will be there in Simhala to carry your mission among your sisters of that country."

Asoka turns his face to the Emissaries of King Tissa.

Asoka — " My dear Emissaries! Go back to your noble King with my word of assurance that Bhikshu Mahindra will reach Simhala at the earliest.Also, convey to brother Tissa that on behalf of myself and the monks of Sanchi I confer on him the title of 'Devanam Priya'- the Beloved of the Gods- a title which King Asoka enjoys in Bharat as an humble *Upasoka.*"

The congregation cheers. As the monks and others disperse, Asoka comes to Devi.

Asoka — "Sakya Kumari! I came to rob of you your dear children whom you robbed from my bosom! What else can be the miracle of Buddha in carrying out His Will? Dear Devi There seems to be no end to your sacrifices for the cause of your Faith."

Asoka' eyes are empty. There are tears in the eyes of others.

Scene 3

High Seas

Two small boats, carrying Mahindra and some monks,sail through the high seas towards Simhala. Storms appear on sky as the waves rise high. The boats sail precariously.

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Scene 4

Sea Shore of Simhala **King Tissa, Mahindra, Simhalese people**

On the sea shore of Simhala stands King Tissa with his ministers and crowds of people to receive Mahindra on his arrival. As the sailing ships touch the shore, people blow conches and perform arati. Mahindra in garb of a Bhikshu lands on the shore. King Tissa comes near to him and down at his feet.

Scene 5

Mahindra's Monastery **Mahindra, Tissa, People**

The King of Simhala, his countries and a large number of people gather on a vast ground outside Mahindra's humble shelter to hear his sermons. Sitting cross-legged and in perfect devotional silence they listen to the words of the Bhikshu, their preceptor.

Mahindra "Devanam Priya King Tissa and my brothers! Before I take your mind to the deeper aspects of the Faith such as *Karma* and the Rebirth, may I first draw yoour attention to human conduct which the Sakyamuni desired to see in each and all. Said the Tathagata 'Let a man overcome anger by kindness,evil by good. Never in the world hatred ceases by hatred;hatred ceases by love'. He said `Let not one take what is not given to him; let not one speak falsely, let not one drink intoxicating drinks; let not one be unchaste'. To Him `the poor and the lowly, the rich and the high, all are one , and that all castes unite in His religion as do the rivers in the sea'. Dear friends! Try to remember that good conduct is the basis of good life; character is the basis of nobility;and the purity of soul is the path for salvation. Let us sing in praise of the Buddha who brought to the earth the Light of Heaven."

Mahindra utters the hymn "Buddham Saranam Gachchhami" and the congregation join him in unison.

Scene 6

Night : Palace **King Tissa, Queen**

As the King of Simhala describes to his Queen the great merit of the Faith of Buddha, the Queen requests him to give the benefit of the new religion to the womenfolk of Simhala.

Tissa "The words of our preceptor,Mahindra, are like the nectar from Heaven. There can be no life worth living unless one is initiated to the Religion of the Buddha."

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Queen "If you feel like this, would you deny to the womenfolk of Simhala the nectar which the menfolk enjoy! I appeal to you to send a fresh request to King Asoka to send to this land a celebrated Bhikshuni to initiate me to the Faith and also my countless sisters and daughters."

Tissa "I have already heard it from my emissaries that Priyadarshi Asoka may even send his own daughter Sanghamitra to our Island Kingdom to preach among our women the religion of the Sakyamuni."

The Queen looks to the King with wonder.

Scene 7

Bodh Gaya **Asoka, Sanghamitra, Monks and Nuns, Tishya Rakshita**

Asoka arrives at Bodh Gaya with Sanghamitra in a ceremonial procession of monks and nuns. A sapling of the Bodhi Tree is planted on a golden vessel in the presence of the Emperor. The monks and nuns sing the hymns as the planting takes place, while from a distance Tishya Rakshita observes the devotion of the King towards the sapling with surprise and curiosity. After the ceremony, Asoka faces the monks and nuns.

Asoka "May I open my mind to you that I find my inner soul in every leaf of this Holy Tree. May the shade of this Tree spread far and wide as the gospels of the Enlightened One spread. This sapling will now be carried by me from Bodh Gaya to the Kalinga port of Tamralipti. From there that the sapling will be carried to Simhala by my daughter Sanghamitra. May the sapling grow in that Island country to give the shade of peace to our brothers and sisters of that blessed land for ages and ages to come."

The Emperor and all others bow down before the Holy Sapling. Thereafter, Asoka lifts the golden vessel to his own head and walks forward, accompanied by Sanghamitra, and followed by hundreds of monks and nuns, in a solemn journey towards the far-away sea. Crowds on either side shed tears to see the King and his daughter walking with heads down in serene humility.

Scene 8

Tamralipti: Seaport **Asoka, Sanghamitra, Karuvaki, Monks and Nuns**

At the famous Kalinga Port of Tamralipti, Queen Karuvaki and the Kalinga monks and nuns receive Asoka and Sanghamitra with flowers and lamps. Amidst the chanting of hymns and blowing of conches, Asoka transfers the vessel from his head to the shaven head of Sanghamitra to carry it to the waiting ship.

Asoka "The waves of the ocean will turn holy as you place this Holy Sapling on the boat and sail towards the Island of Simhala.My dear daughter! Let

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not the love of your mother and the affection of your father cross your mind as you carry on your sacred mission. Forgetting your country and your people, regard Simhala as your land and its people as your brothers and sisters. In the name of Buddha, I bid you farewell !''

Asoka stands motionless as Samghamitra walks towards the ship. His face does not express any emotion of either the joy or the sorrow.

Karuvaki — ''Mankind will never find a scene of this kind when a father sends his daughter unto the unknown for the cause that is sacred. Such is the Will of the Buddha.''

Kalingan Monks — ''Jayatu Bhikshuni Sanghamitra, Jayatu Priyadarshi Asoka.''

Karuvaki — ''With daughter Sanghamitra will go to Simhala thirteen selected nuns of Kalinga who have come with me from Toshali to join her. They will spend the rest of rest of their life in the service of Sanghamitra.''

Asoka — ''Karuvaki! Your work is now over in Kalinga. From here, you too have to go on your mission to the Himalayan territories stretching from Kashmir to Nepal.''

From her boat, Samghamitra looks to her father with folded hands. People on the shore burst into emotional tears and sing the hymn ''Buddham Saranam Gachchhami, Dharmam Saranam Gachchhami, Sangham Saranam Gachchhami.''

The ships begin to sail as Asoka, Karuvaki and crowds look on.

Scene 9

Night: High Seas

Roaring clouds and heavy storms sweep over the high waves as the boats sail perilously in the sea. Sitting inside her shelter near a burning earthen lamp, Sanghamitra sings a song of solace to create confidence in the mind of the sailors and the nuns.

''In deserts or seas,
In moments of danger,
Think of the Saviour,
Who is always near;
Leave it to Him,
Your life or death,
Why then fear,
When He is there.''

The ships sail through darkness
across the fathomless waves.

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Episode Forty-Six

Commentary: Asoka appoints his son Kunala as the Vice-Gerent and devotes himself to the affairs of the Sangha. The Buddhist Sangha, in turn, grows into an enormous organisation and begins to suffer from internal disorder. Disputes and difference lead to disharmony and rifts. Asoka thereupon hold the Great Buddhist Council to restore unity in the Sangha and to give it a new direction for the propagation of the Dharma.

Scene 1

Maurya Court **Asoka, Courtiers, Kunala (Aged 15)**

In the open Court, Asoka announces Prince Kunala's appointment as the Vice-Gerent. The 15-year old Prince received his father's instruction how to conduct himself.

Asoka "Everybody is aware that I have great many works to do for the wellbeing of my people. I have to ceaselessly exert for their happiness both in this world and the next. In view of my engagement for the propagation of a universal religion among all denominations of people, I appoint hereby my son Prince Kunala as my Vice-Gerent to look after the day-to-day administration."

The Courtiers cheer as Prince Kunala receives from Asoka the sceptre of authority.

Asoka "My dear son ! When you hold this sceptre as the Vice-Gerent of the empire now, or, in future as the Emperor, treat it as a symbol of love for all human beings, and as a symbol of the Law of Benevolence which I have pronounced. Remember what *Pitamaha* Bhishma said in good old days for all kings to follow -- `Love all creatures O King, and conduct yourself with truth, simplicity, cool mind, and mercy'."

Kunala bows his head.

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Kunala — "My Revered Father and Emperor ! I shall be true to the principles you uphold. I shall abide by the Laws of Love and Dharma to the best of my ability."

Asoka — "My wise Ministers will give you their advice in matters of administration. May their wisdom be your strength."

Kunala bows his head again. The Courtiers cheer.

Scene 2

Vice-Gerent's Chamber — **Kunala, Radhagupta, Ministers**

Led by the Prime Minister, other Ministers come to the Vice-Gerent to discuss the affairs of the state.

Radhagupta — "Uparaja ! Prince Vitasoka turned a Bhikshu instead of working as the Vice-Regent soon after his appointment. But your case is different. You are the future emperor of the Maurya Empire. The interest of this vast country is your supreme concern. While we as your servants can give you advice, the decisions rest with you."

Kunala — "I shall not fail my country and my people. I shall faithfully follow the benevolent policies of my father, and shall accept your advice in enhancing the values of a paternal dispensation."

1st Minister — "Arya putra ! It is said that wealth is the real strength of a government. The Mauryan Government is faced with a problem when wealth drains out of the treasury day after day in an unending manner. In his over anxiety to promote the cause of his religion, the Emperor is exhausting the treasury in erecting thousands of Stupas, Stambhas, Lipis, and Monasteries at all places of the Empire. It is for you to stop this reckless expenditure."

2nd Minister — "The Emperor has ordered for the release of an astronomical figure for the construction of a new monastery to be named as the Asokarama Monastery in Pataliputra. It is built with the purpose of feeding thousands of Bhikshus everyday round the year. This will be like a strain to our treasury."

Kunala — "The treasury of the richest empire on earth can never get exhausted even if a hundred thousand or ten times that number are fed everyday. If the treasury does not get emptied by feeding rich food to ten lakhs of soldiers everyday, why should it suffer in feeding simple meals to ordinary Bhikshus ?"

Radhagupta — "We fear the resentment of the poeple of other faiths for lavish expenditure in feeding the Buddhists who are ordained to beg from door to door to sustain life ! How can we face the challenges from the Brahmans ?"

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Kunala "The Devanam Priya Raja never distinguishes between a Buddhist and a Brahman when it comes to the question of charity to the needy. To me it appears that the Buddhist Bhikshus are the really needy ones. They have no homes, no families, no property and no supports. They live on begging. If the Brahmans can also renounce their homes and earthly possessions, they can also enjoy the charity of the state."

The Ministers depart with a sense of displeasure.

पुस्तकालय गुरुकुल कांगड़ी विश्वविद्यालय

Scene 3

Night: Kunala's Apartment **Kunala, Maids, Tishya**

In his spacious apartment, half a dozen beautiful maids with Tishya Rakshita try to entertain Prince Kunala after his dinner in the night. Tishya observes the handsome physique of the Prince with lustful eyes. Two maids lift musical instruments to play. Two others take position near the bed to sing. Two remaining girls pour wine from vessels and bring the cups to the Prince to drink.

Kunala "Leave me to myself to go to sleep. I am tired after the day's work. No music or drink will be necessary now."

A Maid "Kumara ! You will enjoy your sleep better with *soma rasa* and songs. You can face your arduous duties tomorrow only after a comfortable night."

Kunala "Please go for your own food and rest. I do not need your services."

The embarrassed girls look at Tishya.

Tishya "Kumara ! This is your first night as the Vice-Gerent. You have to begin from now the royal ways of living. A prince cannot conduct himself to duty unless he enjoys his nightly pleasures."

Kunala "Do not forget that I am the Vice-Gerent of my father who leads the most austere life as that of a Bhikshu. If he does not need music, songs or wine, I too need not have any. I say again, leave me to myself."

The girls quietly go out, but Tishya stays on.

Tishya (*smiling*) "Aryaputra ! Your august father is an aged person and also a Buddhist. He has crossed his youthful days of enjoyment and entertainment. But you are just bubbling into your youth and not yet an initiated person. I would appeal to you, therefore, to adhere to the needs of royalty as well as to the demands of the youth."

Heedlesss of Tishya's words, Kunala stretches his body on his bed and is about to close his tired eyes. Tishya comes near with a vessel of soma rasa *and stands close to the body of the Prince.*

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Kunala (*annoyed*) "I said, I do not need it. I say, you too go out of my room."

Tishya stands motionless with loving and lustful eyes.

Tishya "Kumara ! I have never seen in my eyes such a handsome body. You look like a young god from the Heaven. Your eyes can lure to death any damsel on earth. I want to see your body as long as I can. There will be no end to that desire, it seems."

Tishya extends her hand towards the arm of the Prince when he gets up in an angry state of mind.

Kunala "Shameless Maid ! Do you venture to talk like this to me unless you are a dare-devil ! How vicious is your mind ! How sinful ! Clear out of my eyes at once and go to your bed to repent for your sinful thought. Never again should you come to my presence either in day or in night. Better I should lose my eyes rather than see the face of sin which you possess."

Tishya Rakshita looks at Kunala's angry face and goes out forthwith.

Scene 4

Same Night: Tishya's Bedroom **Tishya**

Tishya enters into her bedroom and throws herself down on bed like a mad woman. In the light of a dim lamp, her eyes sparkle as those of a snake. Her face appears abnormal. She gets up. Burning with anger she grinds her teeth and speaks to herself.

Tishya "Am I still alive to endure his humiliating words ! He says, his eyes will never see my face of sin again. Yes, he will never see my face or eyes. But, the eyes of Tishya Rakshita will never miss him from sight till I avenge my disgrace. Let the world see what can a woman do in vengeance."

She takes out a crystal mirror and observes her own face.

Tishya "A womana knows to hide her age. She knows to look as young as she likes. Tishya can make even old Asoka a victim to her charms and tricks ! Let his son realise what this wretched maid is capable of."

She sinks to her bed still shaking and trembling.

Scene 5

River Bank: Temple **Priests, Minister**

A senior Minister and some priests meet in a temple on the bank of the river Ganga to discuss about the King's charity in the new monastery.

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1st Priest — "There is no money to buy fruits for the deity of this main temple of Pataliputra. There is no food even for the destitutes who come for a little *prasad*. But, go to the newly built monastery of Asokarama to see there thousands of fat-bellied Buddhists being fed everyday. And these monks do not believe in our gods and deities ! The Gods, it seems, have closed their eyes to what is happening on earth."

Minister — "The King calls himself the Beloved of the Gods. The Gods therefore shower their love on him as much as they like. In turn, the King showers his unbounded love on his monks. What can we do except curse our fate !"

2nd Priest — "You ministers deserve our curses for your silence over the King's deeds. Is not the Prime Minister a Brahman ? Are not many of you Brahmans ? Why do you remain in office if you cannot safeguard the interests of your Gods and their worshippers ?"

Minister — "Why not you too go to the monastery to ask for foods as do the Buddhists do ? Who can distinguish you from others among crowds of people ? We hear that different groups of heretical Buddhists also come to feed themselves !"

3rd Priest — "Better we try this trick. We can instigate thousands of poor Brahmans to assemble there for food everyday. Let the keeper of the monastery, Sthavira Yasas, face the music."

The priests discuss in whispers their strategy of action.

Scene 6

Asokarama Monastery — **Yasas, Crowds of Monks**

Outside the Asokarama monastery are seen mixed crowds of Buddhists and Brahmans, clamouring for food. Yasas tries to quieten them but fails. Some inmates of the monastery find heretics among the Bhikshus and raise complaints.

Monk (*to Yasas*) — "There are many heretics here for food which they do not deserve. They have no faith in our doctrines. They decry the rules of the Sangha. They are out to spoil the sanctity of the religion of the Sakyamuni."

Yasas (*addressing the crowd*) — "It is only the Bhikshus of the Holy Order who have renounced their homes, possessions and desires are entitled to receive the King's charity, not all. The householders have no entry to this monastery."

The heretics and householders raise loud protests.

Crowd — "A place of feeding is no place for discrimination. The hungry are all equal. Who can know who is a Bhikshu and who is not ?"

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Yasas "I must demand of you a test. Those of you who have gone through the *Uposatha* ceremony will be treated as real Bhikshus. Those who do not believe in that are heretics."

Heretics "Many of us deny the validity of the *Uposatha* ceremony which is no proof of real faith. We challenge our opponents to a debate."

Others "We protest ! We do not accept your challenge. Debates will lead us nowhere in matters of faith and traditional practice."

Heated arguments break out. The Brahmans join the arguments to make the confusion worse confounded. Much heat is generated leading to exchange of blows, Violence erupts. A minister soon appears on horseback with law-enforcing guards.

Minister "I shall cut down the heads of the heretics who are causing physical injury to innocent and elderly Bhikshus. They violate the principle of non-injury to others."

Soldiers chase away the heretics. Many fall wounded and bleeding. Yasas raises his voice to restore peace in vain.

Scene 7

Monastery: Interior **Asoka, Yasas**

The Emperor visits the monastery after the ugly incidents and hears from Yasas the gravity of the situation in a distressful mood.

Yasas "Rajan ! The number of Bhikshus has increased to enormous shape. Unfortunately, many of the entrants to the Sanghas all over the country are no genuine believers. Some of them misinterprete the meaning of the tenets. Heretical sects are raising head inside the Buddhist Order. If the process is not brought to an end at the earliest, the unity of the Buddhist fraternity will break up."

Asoka "Disharmony will destroy the very foundation of the Faith. At a time when Buddhism is sweeping over the country and outside like a mighty wave, the unity of the Sangha is imperative for the good of humanity. Spiritual and intellectual fabric of the Faith must not tear apart. If the wise monks differ on higher philosophical problems, let them gather together to deliberate over the issues and reach at the truth."

Yasas "Unless you take the initiative to summon the great Sthaviras and the heads of the renowned monasteries of all the places, the controversies over the doctrines will continue to persist."

Asoka "Controversies have always been there in the past, even in the days of Buddha Himself. But the wise have also the desire to resolve them in

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peace. As I have heard, soon after the death of the Lord, His great disciples gathered in a grand Council to prepare the canonical texts for future guidance of men. That was the First Buddhist Council, held at Rajagriha. A hundred years after that event, the Second Buddhist Council was held at Vaisali to strengthen the spiritual fabric of the Faith. Now, when the size of the Sangha and the influence of the Religion have grown by leaps and bounds, let me summon the Third Buddhist Council to meet in Pataliputra.''

Asoka leaves the monastery.

Scene 8

Prince Vitasoka, turned into Bhikshu Vitasoka, has just finished the construction of a Stupa in a remote rural area. As he retreats from the place with the monks, a mob attacks the Stupa and tries to demolish it. The Buddhists of the nearby place protest in non-violent manner. But they are chased away.

Scene 9

Radhagupta's House **Radhagupta, Tishya**

Radhagupta is getting ready to leave for his office in the palace when Tishya Rakshita comes in.

Tishya ''Mahamantriji ! Are you going to the palace to attend to your last duties as Prime Minister ?''

Radhagupta feels annoyed.

Radhagupta ''What prompts you to say so ?''

Tishya ''Your days in your august office are now numbered. I have to inform you in confidence that the Vice-Gerent will soon request the Emperor to dismiss you. He has come to believe that you are instigating a Brahmanical unrest against the Emperor for his patronisation of Buddhism. Reports are pouring in that the Brahmans have started the destruction of the Stupas at several places. You are also instigating the officers to disobey the orders of the King in matters of lavish expenditure in construction works. The Vice-Gerent is well aware of your dangerous activities.''

Radhagupta ''Mischievous Lady ! I do not know if these are the figments of your imagination or real informations based on facts ! Of course, the way the situations are taking shape, nothing is impossible. The Emperor does not consult me. The Vice-Gerent dislikes me. The Brahmans and priests hate me. And, the Buddhists regard me as their worst enemy. Yet, the helpless Radhagupta continues as the Prime Minister of the Magadhan Empire ! This is the irony of fate.''

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Tishya "It is worthy of a Radhagupta to feel helpless and dejected ? One who could outwit Susima, outwit a Vidisha Devi, outwit the Kalingans, should stand defeated before a young boy who is the Vice-Gerent just by chance and without possessing a brain ! Why not revive your former self to outwit this Prince before he throws you out ? If your supreme concern is the cause of the Empire, you can play a role worthy of that cause. All the ministers are with you. So also the priests. All the generals are against the present policies of pacificism. Once you activise your intelligence instead of feeling desperate, you will see your way."

Radhagupta "Tishya ! You are always what you are. Will you work with me as in earlier days ?"

Tishya "I shall be ever with you if only you repose your complete trust in me."

Radhagupta "Can a straw stand up against a storm ? You and I are mere straw-like individuals before the sweeping storm of Buddhist upheaval. Can we stand up against the Emperor and the Vice-Gerent who are in the high tides of their fame and popularity ? Let us leap into the dark, nontheless !"

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Episode Forty-Seven

Commentary: As Asoka's glory reaches its meridian splendour, his personal worries also come to a depressing depth. Successes as a missionary-monarch coupled with internal problems created by others present the picture of a great man struggling against unforeseeable odds.

Scene 1

Stormy Night: Bodhi Tree **Tishya Rakshita, Followers**

In a dreadful night of storms, when the sky is covered with roaring clouds, lightenings and thunders, Tishya Raksita with her followers gets down from a chariot in front of the Bodhi Tree.

Tishya "This is the Bodhi Tree under which Buddha got His Enlightenment. The Emperor says, his soul and mind are centred in this Tree. For the sake of our Gods and Goddesses we have to see the decay and death of this Tree so that the Emperor does not proceed further to promote the religion of Buddha. For us it will be the most pious work to destroy this Tree. With that will decline the Faith of the Buddhists."

Follower "Should we cut down the Tree from root to branches."

Tishya "No. That will create suspicion and the Emperor will massacre all the suspects. It must appear that the Tree has died a natural death because of its age."

Lightenings flash over Tishya's face. She takes out a big container and hands it over to one of her followers.

Tishya "This is the poison to kill the Tree. Go and dig the earth around the Tree, create some deep holes, and pour little quantities of this liquid in each hole. The poison will go down to the roots.

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She takes out from another bag the roots and seeds of some plants and hands over them to some other followers.

Tishya "Push these seeds and shrub-roots deep into the earth. They will soon sprout into thorny plants to cause decay to the Tree."

Tishya's followers surroud the Tree and start their operation. As they dig the earth, a cobra emerges from a hole and bites one of them. He raise a painful cry and falls dead.

Tishya "Take away the body and throw it to river."

Clouds roar ceaselessly. Sounds of thunders cotinue in all fury. The storm plays havoc to the trees around. In the flashes of the lightenings the work goes on. Tishya keeps on standing under the lashing rains and winds till the operation is over.

Tishya "Some of you should hide in the forest as hunters. Every night you should come to the Tree, climb up its branches, and sprinkle this liquid on the uppermost tender branches of the Tree. Come back to Pataliputra only after you see the beginning of the decay of the leaves and branches at the top."

She hands over a container, containing poison, to some and enters into the chariot with others. The storms shake the earth and sky as the chariot rolls out precariously.

Scene 2

Evening: River Ghat **Tishya, Maid**

Tishya Rakshita and a maid are taking bath in the Ganga at the sunset. Her eyes suddenly spot Prince Kunala riding fast on the long road on the river bank in eastward direction.

Tishya "That is Prince Kunala on horse! Where does he ride every evening without escorts? Does he not know the rules that the Vice-Gerent cannot ride out alone when darkness sets in?"

Maid "Love knows neither rule nor fear! A lover goes alone to meet his sweet-heart, whether he is a vice-gerent or a villian. A hero, too, needs no escort on his secret mission."

Tishya (*excited*) "Love! Does he have a lady-love? I thought, he has conquered sexual passions to qualify himself for his father's throne."

Maid "Why not follow the Prince one evening to see his love in your own eyes?"

The maid whispers to Tishya about the love affairs of Kunala and Kanchanamala. Tishya listens attentively with a vicious face.

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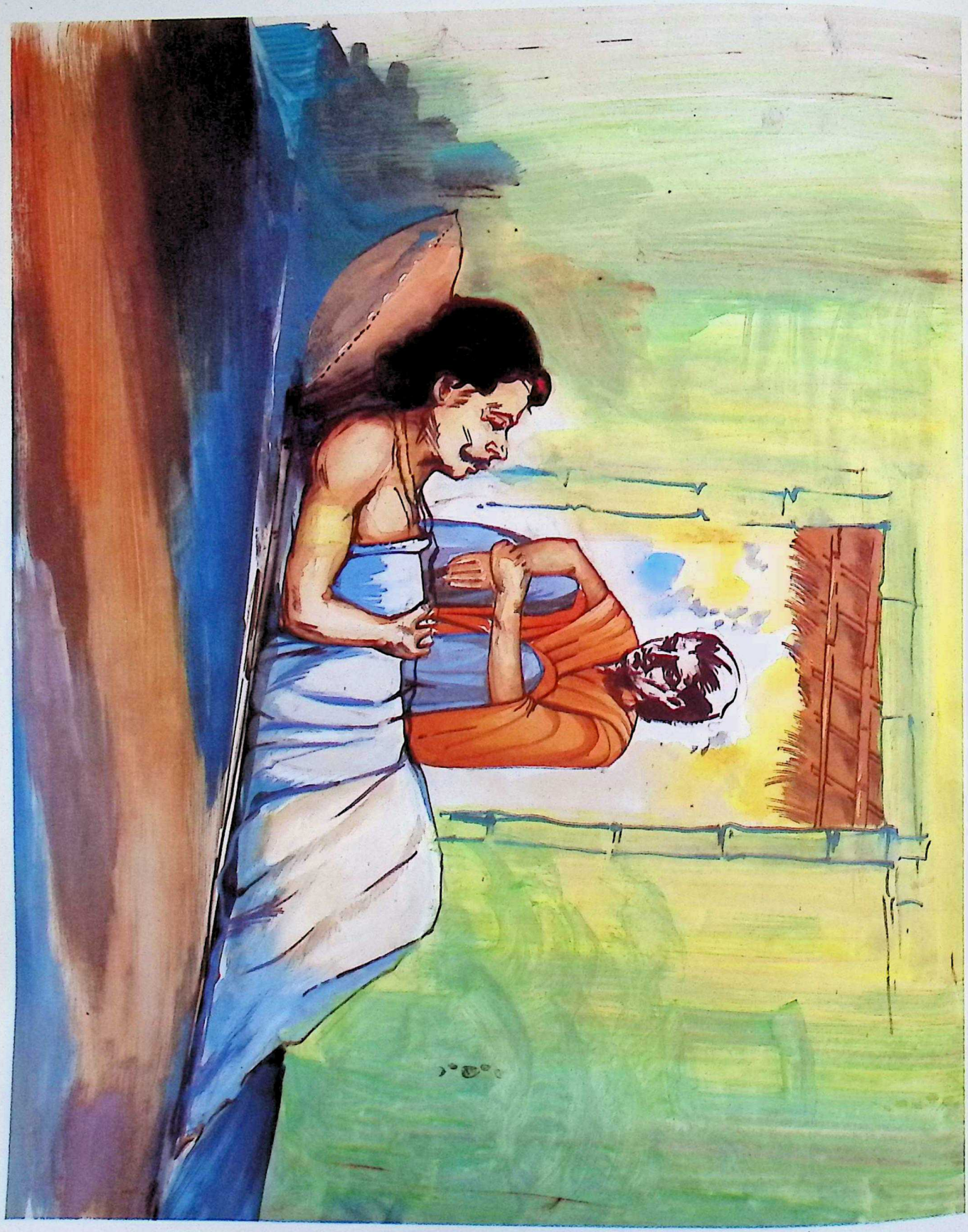

Sick Asoka in a Monastery after His Religious Mission of Long Journeys

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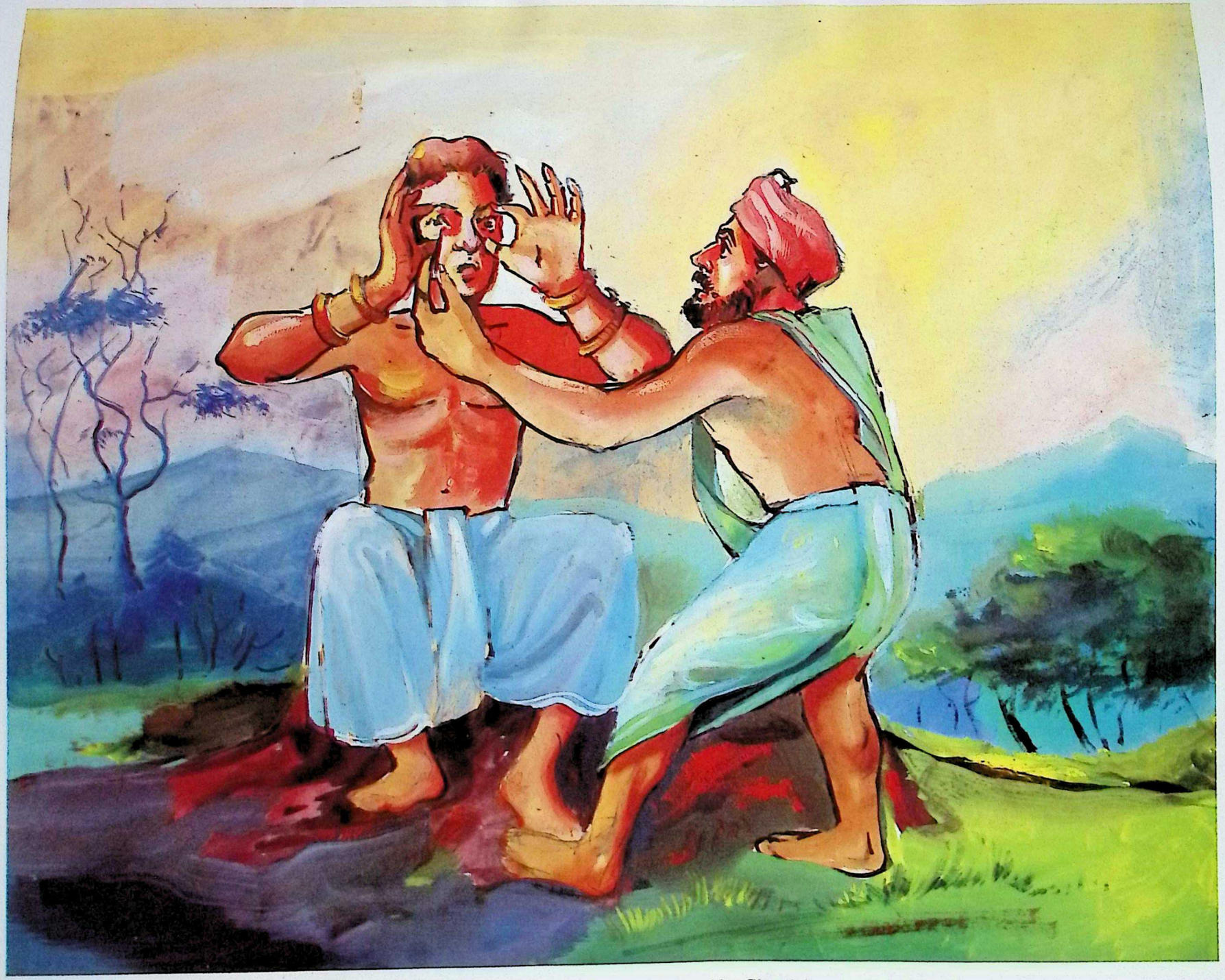

Prince Kunala's Eyes being Destroyed by Chandala

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Prince Kunala Playing Flute before Asoka as a Blind Beggar

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Scene 3

Evening : River Bank **Kunala, Kanchanamala, Tishya's Two Agents**

At a secluded place on the bank of Ganga, a beautiful young girl is sitting on a rocky surface touching the water, and joyously waiting for Prince Kunala to come. As the twilight of the evening sets in, Kunala comes riding and gets down from horse. He proceeds towards Kanchanamala and sits down near her.

Kunala "Kanchan! I am a little late today. I had to attent to some urgent duties."

Kanchanamala "A day may come when your duty may not permit you to come to me at all!"

Kunala "Duty is noble, but love is nobler. He who sacrifices duty for love is insincere. He who sacrifices love for duty is a coward. I am neither insincere nor am I a coward."

Kanchanamala "What will happen if the King comes to know of your love? Will you then turn a coward to deny it?"

Kunala "Let us not apprehend what will happen or not. As for me, I shall remain ever true to my love. Now, teach me to play the flute true to your promise. Let me learn the sweet music from your sweet lips."

Kanchanamala takes out her flute and plays it. Next, she passes it on to Kunal and teaches him how to put it on the lips and how to place finger tips at several points.

Two masked men suddenly emerge from darkness and try to lift away Kanchanamala by force. Kunala fights with them singlehanded. At length, he overcomes them and throws them to the deep river to struggle for life. He next takes up Kanchanamala to his horse and rides away.

Scene 4

Bodhi Tree **Monks and Nuns**

Hundreds of monks and nuns find to their utter surprise the decay of the Bodhi Tree with leaves and tender branches drying up. They beat their heads on ground, weep bitterly and fall prostrate before the Tree. They chant hymns and invoke the Lord's mercy to save the life of the Tree.

Old Monk "How will the Beloved of the Gods receive this news of the sad and ominous occurrence on the eve of the meeting of the Great Buddhist Council? He may break down and cancel the Council."

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2nd Monk "Everything happens as the Lord Wills. To hide what is happening to the Bodhi Tree will be the worst sin on our part. Let us bring it to his knowledge at once."

The monks weep and pray. The Tree presents an unusual spectacle.

Scene 5

Bodhi Tree **Asoka, Karuvaki, Monks, Nuns**

Before the Bodhi Tree are seen seated Asoka, Karuvaki with hundreds of monks and nuns. The Emperor is in deep meditation while others offer prayers with tearful eyes. Dozens of elephants carry water by trunk from the river Niranjana and pour it at the root of the sinking Tree. Lines of people carry water in pots and flood the areas all around. Elephants raise their trunks upward to sprinkle water as high as possible. Wild shrubs from around the Tree are plucked up by the nuns. Continuous prayers go on till the night descends.

Karuvaki (*to Asoka*) "Aryaputra! You are fasting for the whole day. It is time for you to retire to the monastery for rest, food and sleep."

Asoka "The life of the Tree is more dear to me than my own life. I shall do my penance here as long as the Tree remains in this shape. May the Lord punish me for my sins, but revive the Tree for the hope of mankind."

He closes his eyes and begins meditation. Thousands of lamps are lighted as the monks and nuns go on carrying and pouring water.

Scene 6

Sunrise : Bodhi Tree **Asoka , Others**

Three days later at the sunrise, the Bodhi Tree manifests the freshness of revival. Leaves look green and the tender branches straight. Crowds of devotees burst into joyful cheers. Asoka opens his eyes and observes the Tree. His pale face turns bright. Karuvaki helps him to get up from the ground.

Asoka "The revival of the Tree is like a rebirth for me. Hereafter, may the Wheel of Dharma turn and turn in its divine glory to spread light in every known land."

Crowds chant the hymn "Buddham Saranam Gachchhami."

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Scene 7

Night : Radhagupta's House **Radhagupta, Tishya**

Looking depressed after her failure to destroy the Bodhi Tree, Tishya Rakshita comes to the Prime Minister with more sinisters designs.

Tishya "All my attempts in defending my religion end in vain. The Bodhi Tree did not die. The Great Buddhist Council is about to meet. The Vice-Gerents's net of suspicion is gradually fastening around you. But you have not yet worked out any plan from your side. You, as if, leave every mischief to a woman's brain!"

Radhagupta "Speaking the truth, I am like a spent force, a demoralised man!"

Tishya "If that be so, would you work out my next plan to remove the Vice-Gerent from the capital so that you may assume your former self as an administrator?"

Radhagupta "It is impossible to remove Kunala from Pataliputra. No plea will work. The Emperor is deeply satisfied with the Prince. You cannot ask the Emperor to send Kunala to a remote place like Taxila on the plea of a revolt as we did in case of Prince Susima. Times have changed. There is peace inside and outside. On what ground therefore can I ask the King to send his son away?"

Tishya "You may advise the Prince to visit Taxila for a brief period in order to create confidence in the mind of the distant populations that their future Emperor is deeply interested in their welfare. No Prince has gone to western Bharat and to the frontiers since the days of Prince Susima. I think, you can easily persuade the Prince to visit the frontiers himself before his father's ambassadors march on their peace mission to the kingdoms of the west."

Radhagupta "This is possible. But what purpose does it serve if Kunala goes out to Taxila?"

Tishya "At least, it will assure your survival for some time."

Radhagupta "You take pleasure in frightening me as if I am dying to continue in office! You are wrong in this, dear Tishya. I am myself thinking of giving up my office."

Tishya "That will be like a death signal for the Mauryan Empire. The last vestiga of strength and order of the state will disappear with your departure. If you do not survive as the Prime Minister, the Empire itself will decline. The King could revive a sinking Bodhi Tree, but he cannot revive a sinking empire if it comes to that stage."

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Radhagupta "No man is immortal. Nobody is indispensable to any cause or country. I am not convinced that the future of the country rests in the hands of an ordinary mortal like Radhagupta."

Tishya thinks for a few moments.

Tishya "Mahamantri! You may not think of the future of your country. But can you escape thinking of your own life? The Buddhists of Bodh Gaya are one in their suspicion that it is you who set your people to destroy the Bodhi Tree. Soon they will meet the Vice-Gerent to carry their story. For your safety, therefore, send the Prince to a distance before he starts investigation. Once he goes out, we can delay his return."

Radhagupta begins to brood over the issue. Tishya leaves his room.

Scene 8

Night : Kanchanamala's House **Kanchanamala, Kunala**

Inside her humble house on the bank of Ganga, sitting before a dim lamp, Kunala and Kanchanamala talk to each other.

Kunala "Kanchan! Allow me to go out of Pataliputra for a brief period in connection with my duty. I have obtained my father's permission, and may leave the palace as soon as possible. I shall be back within thirty to fifty days."

Kanchanamala "Fifty days! It must be a distant destination! Fifty days may turn out hundred days."

Kunala "I am destined for distant Taxila."

Kanchanamala "O dear! Taxila, that farthest place of the Empire! I cannot see you go to that far. If you go, I shall accompany you as one of your maids."

Kunala "How can I take you with me when we are not married? What will my father think of me? What may the people think of their future king?"

Kanchanamala (*sobbing*) "We may marry in Taxila in an appropriate manner and inform the Emperor.'

Father of Kanchanamala enters into the room.

Father "Kumara! As I know my daughter, she can never stand the separation even for a day. After the attempt to kidnap her the other evening she has lost her nerve to stay in this poor man's house. Some are surely malicious that the Prince loves her. Since she has given her heart to you, I pray that she may accompany you to Taxila to escape threats to her life."

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Kunala "I shall take her to Taxila and marry her there. My father will be delighted to hear of our union. Give us your blessings."

Kunala bows down at the feet of the old man.

Scene 9

Highway

Prince Kunala with Kanchanamala, followed by a large cavalry force, is heading towards Taxila in a chariot.

Scene 10

Night : Tishya's Room **Tishya, Her Agents**

Inside her room in the night, Tishya is seen giving instructions to 5 of her trusted men.

Tishya "Reach Taxila as royal servants and live in the palace of the Viceroy or wherever the Prince decides to stay. Three of my trusted maid have gone with the attendants of the Prince. You can recognise them from their Yavana-like hair style."

Chief Agent "Give us your instruction what to do there. To tell you frankly, we can never have the courage to come near to the Prince. For Heaven's sake, we can never think of doing anything against him. We respect him as a god."

Tishya "Do you mean to suggest that I intend to do some harm to the noble Prince? Everybody admires his qualities of head and heart. He is indeed god-like. All that you have to do is to intercept the letters of the Prince to the Emperor and send them to me. This is the instruction of the Prime Minister. He wants him to stay there for a longer period in the interest of the empire. But, the Prince being just a boy, may write to his father seeking permission to return. This will harm the cause of the frontier safety when the foreigners know of the peace policy of the King. Do you understand the meaning of your responsibility?"

The agents nod their heads. Tishya hands them over a bag, full of gold pieces.

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Episode Forty-Eight

Commentary: The Great Buddhist Council resolves differences among various Buddhist sects and restores unity and harmony of the Sangha. The Council recommends it to the King to send missionaries to different countries of South-East Asia to preach Buddhism. Asoka also decides to send his Ambassadors of Peace to the Courts of the ruling Kings of all the known countries of the West.

Scene 1

Asokarama Monastery **Asoka, Congregation of Monks**

The Great Buddhist Council meets in Pataliputra outside the Monastery of Asokarama. The Buddhist Sthaviras, Bhikshus, philosophers and learned scholars from all parts of Bharat assemble at the invitation of Asoka to deliberate upon the inner values of Buddhism and to resolve the disputes among the different sects. Moggaliputta Tissa is elevated to the chair to preside over the Council. Asoka inaugurates the proceedings by his opening address.

Asoka "The Creater has created man as the most conscious creature among all beings by giving him the power of perception to distinguish between the good and the evil, virtue and the vice, and the right and the wrong. The Tathagata Buddha has given to the mankind the Universal Law of Dharma that rests on all that is good, virtuous and right. He has taught man to believe in the brotherhood of mankind more than in the fatherhood of God. He has directed man to turn from the ritual towards the spiritual. While rituals lead to disputes and disunity, the spiritual leads to unity and harmony. For the followers of the Buddha, 'Happiness in this world and in the other world is difficult to secure without great love of morality, careful examination, great obedience, and great fear of sin'.

"While the learned and the wise differ on outer aspects of the Dharma, there can be no difference on its inner aspects. Truth is one and absolute.

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What is good is universally good. Let the wise men of the time develop their philosophy on Truth and Goodness, on the Universal Morality and the Absolute Righteousness. Let the rivers merge with the ocean. Let the thoughts develop on the fundamentals of *Daya, Satyam, Saucham, Sadhuta, Samyama, Bhavasuddhi,* and *Samacharanam.* Let all differences sink in the sea of harmony. Let the Sangha unite to elevate the mental condition of the humanity at large. May we pray for the Blessings of Buddha.''

The members of the congregation bow their heads in reverence. Asoka takes his seat among the monks as the learned Sthaviras begin their deliberation.

Scene 2

Monstery: Interior **Asoka, Upagupta**

At the end of the deliberations of the Buddhist Council when the Bhikshus and others go back to their respective places, Upagupta advises the Emperor to launch upon the grand objectives of his sovereignty.

Upagupta ''Devanam Priya! The Sangha has emerged stronger than ever before. In this great hour of your spiritual triumph when heretics and doubters are silenced, the world needs you as a messiah of new hope to elevate mankind from the depth of irreligiousness. It is the desire of the Sangha that you now take upon yourself the role of a preacher as no king has done before. May the Wheel of Dharma turn under your perseverance to awaken the humanity.''

Asoka ''This Bhikshu will carry out the order of the Sangha to the best of his ability. My preachers will now go to the farthest corners of this hemisphere. Side by side, it will also by my endeavour to send my emissaries of peace to all the known Kings of the Western hemisphere. Let the wealth of the Maruyan Empire now be spent to promote the cause of human brotherhood.''

Asoka bows down before his preceptor.

Scene 3

Taxila : Governor's Palace **Kunala, Governor, Amatyas**

Sitting on the viceregal throne in the palace of Taxila, Prince Kunala talks to the Governor and the Amatyas.

Kunala ''I have come to Taxila to assure the people of these vast regions on the frontiers that the benevolent administration of my father is dedicated to

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the wellbeing of all men. I am happy to understand that the rumour about disconent in Taxila is totally baseless.''

Governor — ''Uparajan! The rumours you have heard must have emanated from external sources. Your honour may well realise during your presence here that never was this region more peaceful as it is today because of the paternal benevolence of the Beloved of the Gods.''

An Amatya — ''Kumara Rajan ! Along with peace and tranquillity, Taxila enjoys a time of unprecedented prosperity. Commerce with the outside world has grown enormously. While fearful of the might of the Mauryas, the foreign countries also open their doors to our traders because of the peaceful intention of the Emperor.''

Kunala — ''I offer my love to all of you. I offer my love to the people of Taxila. My love to you all is the love of my father, the Emperor who loves all men everywhere.''

Scene 4

Taxila : Hillside — **Kunala, Kanchanamala**

With snowy mountain peaks in the background, at the foot of a hill outside Taxila, Prince Kunala and Princess Kanchanamala are walking hand in hand in a joyous mood.

Kunala — ''Look at the beauty of the mountains, of the peaks under snow, of the blue sky, of the white patches of clouds, of the plants and the flowers, and of the flying birds. Beyond all these beauties of Nature, I have also to look to your beauty, more attractive than that of an angel.''

Kanchanamala — ''This place is really like a paradise on earth. With you near me, it is much more than that. I am in love with the place. Let us stay here as long as possible.''

Kunala — ''No dear, we cannot stay here for long. My father needs my presence in Pataliputra.''

Kanchanamala — ''Can we not stay here in this quiet atmosphere till you see your child?''

She looks shy. Kunala looks to her face with great delight.

Kunala — ''Darling! What a happy news! Yes, I shall write to my father about our marriage and of your state of health. I shall also inform him that I am busy with the works of the Sangha in these remote parts of the Empire. I am sure, he will permit us to stay here for a longer time.''

Kanchanamala takes out her flute and plays it softly as Kunala sits near her and listens to enchanting music.

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Scene 5

Taxila Palace **Kunala, Tishya's Agent**

Kunala hands over his letter, addressed to the Emperor, to an attendant who is an agent of Tishya Rakshita from Pataliputra.

kunala "Go back to Pataliputra with this letter and hand it over to the Emperor. Come back with his reply as soon as he writes it."

The attendant receives the sealed cover, bows down and goes out.

Scene 6

Monastery **Asoka, Yasas**

Asoka and Yasas discuss about the prospects of the coming missions.

Yasas "Rajan! The miracle of the Lord has worked. Hundreds of elderly and youthful monks have come forward to become the soldiers of your *Dharma-Vijaya*. They are ready to brave all risks and to go out to most inaccessible lands in and outside Bharat. They are prepared to cross the seas in the east and the mountains in the west. They await your order to begin their journeys."

Asoka "I am waiting for Kunala to come back before I launch the *Dharma-Vijaya* in full scale. Leaving the Prince in Pataliputra, I shall accompany the monks as far as possible to bid them farewell for their distant destinations."

Yasas "The monks from Taxila bring the news to me that the Prince is well and is busy looking after the newly established Sanghas in those remote frontier regions. It is better that the Prince continues to stay in Taxila to see off our preachers towards the west."

Asoka "I am glad to hear this. The Lord has blessed me with a son like Kunala who will perpetuate the mission of his father when on throne. May Buddha shower His Blessings on him."

Scene 7

Night: Tishya's Room **Tishya, Agent from Taxila**

Tishya Rakshita receives her Agent from Taxila carrying the letter from Kunala to the Emperor. The courier hands over the sealed cover without showing any sign of suspicion.

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Agent "Madam! The Prince ordered me to hand over this letter to His Majesty and to carry back his reply at the earliest."

Tishya "As you know, the Emperor is already away from the Capital to see off his missionaries at several distant points. You may go back to Taxila to inform the Prince about his father's absence. When the Emperor returns, and it may be late by months, he will send his reply to his dear son. Tell him that you have given the letter to the King's personal attendant, not me."

The agent goes out. Tishya tears up the sealed cover and reads the contents of the letter.

Tishya "An angel from heaven descended to be his consort on earth! Well may Tishya reduce this future Empress to a beggar-maid!"

Her eyes look dangerous and face, vicious.

Scene 8

Scene after scene follows showing the departure of the Bhikshus and preachers to the farthest corners of Bharat. Scene after scene follows showing the arrival of the Ambassadors of Peace in different countries outside Bharat.

a. *Buddhist preachers under the leadership of Bhikshu Majjhantika going to Kashmir and Gandhara, crossing rivers and mountains.*

b. *Buddhist monks under Maharakshita proceeding towards Western Asia through deserts and mountains.*

c. *Monks are on their way to the Himalayan territories under Bhikshu Majjhima.*

d. *Bhikshu Mahadharma Rakshita crosses the Vindhya Mountain Ranges with his followers towards the Dakshinapatha.*

e. *Bhikshu Mahadeva enters into Mysore with other monks.*

f. *Sona and Uttara sail in boats with monks to preach Budhism in Suvar-anabhumi and Siam (Burma and Thailand).*

g. *Asoka's Ambassadors of Peace reach the Court of King Antiochus II Theos of Syria and are received by the King.*

h. *At the foot of the Pyramids, King Ptolemy II Philadelphos of Egypt receives Asoka's Ambassadors.*

i. *Asoka's Ambassadors of Peace pass by the ruins of ancient Athens and proceed towards Macedonia where King Antigonus Gonatus receives the mission.*

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j. *Asoka's Peace Mission is received by the King Magas of Cyrene.*

k. *The King of Epirus, Alexander, receives the Peace Mission of Asoka.*

l. *Queen Karuvaki is seen supervising the erection of the Sarnath Pillar with the Asokan Bell Capital and the Asoka Chakra.*

Scene 9

Monastery **Asoka, Yasas, Monks**

A chariot halts outside the Monastery of Asokarama with a sick Asoka in it, lying on bed. Several monks jump down from the chariot and help the Emperor to get down. Yasas comes out and feels perplexed to see the condition of the Emperor. Asoka looks lean and thin with a sun-burnt face.

The Emperor is taken inside the monastery to lie down on a bed.

Yasas (*looking sad*) "Rajan! It is for more than ten months that you have travelled across the length and breadth of the country to invite this damage to your body."

Asoka "Has not Prince Kunala returned yet? How does he forget his father? I had gone as far as the river Sindhu to see my peace missions off, but could not go to Taxila for ill health. Have you received news from the Prince?"

His words are feeble.

Yasas "Monks bring constant news from Taxila. The Prince will soon be back once that you are in the capital. He knows about your absence."

Asoka shows signs of restlessness. Yasas places his palm on the Emperor's forehead and expresses grave anxiety.

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Episode Forty-Nine

Commentary: Asoka falls critically ill on return to the capital after his extensive journeys. Tishya Rakshita resorts to fantastic efforts to save the life of the Emperor when the physicians express helplessness. In return, she manipulates to become the queen of Asoka, and also enacts the most inhuman act of her life in wrecking vengeance on Kunala taking advantage of the King's ailment.

Scene 1

Asoka's Bedroom **Asoka, Radhagupta, Vaidyas, Tishya, Maids**

Asoka is lying on his bed in serious condition. He is suffering from acute abdominal pain. Radhagupta brings in the chief Vaidya and other physicians. Tishya comes with the Prime Minister along with some maids. Asoka looks at Radhagupta.

Asoka "I shall soon attend to the works of administration and pass orders on pending issues."

He puts his palms on his abdomen expressing extreme pain, but speaks again.

Asoka "Bring back Prince Kunala from Taxila immediately. Somebody told me about a revolt there. But I was glad to hear at the Indus and also at Indraprastha that the whole region is in perfect peace. Why should the Prince wait there if his presence is not necessary ? Despatch messengers to bring him back."

Radhagupta "Right now I shall send messengers to Taxila with your message to the Prince."

Asoka makes an agonising cry. The Vaidyaraj comes near to the bed and puts his palm on the Emperor's belly. He shows fear the

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moment the physician touches the body.

Vaidyaraj "Your Majesty, the pain is acute. I pray that there shall be no movement of the body till the pain subsidies. Complete rest is a sure medicine for any pain in the stomach."

The physicians discuss among themselves and bring out herbal medicines from a silken bag. The Vaidyaraj turns to Tishya and the maids.

Vaidyaraj "These are the medicines to be given to His Majesty through day and night whenever the symptoms of pain appear. We shall be back tomorrow morning or at any time you call for. Do not permit anybody to come to the Emperor."

The physicians go out. Radhagupta looks to Tishya.

Radhagupta "Tishya ! You have to forget your day or night till His Majesty recovers. Be in charge of the treatment as the physicians direct."

Asoka opens his eyes though in writhing agony.

Asoka "Has my order gone to all the Viceroys about the appointment of the *Dharma-Mahamatras* and the *Rajukas* for the specific purpose as given by me ?"

Radhagupta "Orders are ready. They will be despatched when the Royal Seal is stamped."

Asoka "Send them to me for the seals of approval."

Asoka again complains of pain and tries to press his hands on the abdomen. Tishya sits down on his side and puts her hand on Asoka's belly. Another maid brings medicine in a cup which Tishya pours into the patient's mouth.

Radhagupta observes the condition of the Emperor for some moments and leaves the room.

Scene 2

Adjacent Room **5 Vaidyas, Tishya**

Inside a closed room adjacent to the Emperor's bedroom, five Vaidyas are in serious discussion in respect of treatment. Their faces show grave anxiety and concern. Tishya listens to their talks in tearful eyes.

Vaidyaraj "It is seven days now when we first administered our medicine. The malady aggravates day after day. Everyday we change medicines but the patient does not respond to our medicines. It is only the divine mercy

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which can do miracles. Human power is of no use in such conditions.''

They close their eyes in prayful mood. Next, they resume their discussion.

2nd Vaidya — ''The Emperor goes into delirium again and again which is no good sign. This is a symptom for the worse.''

3rd Vaidya — ''To me it is necessary to perform a *Yagna* to propitiate the Gods.''

He looks at Tishya's face.

Tishya — ''The Emperor, as you know, will not like it. He has no faith in the rituals and *Yagnas*. Moreover, any such ceremony will raise alarm in the empire. So far, nobody knows of His Majesty's illness, not even Queen Karuvaki at Sarnath. The news of a *Yagna* may spread like a wild fire to draw thousands of Buddhists to the palace.''

Vaidyaraj — ''You are correct. We may try a new medicine for another three days before we think of our next step.''

Tishya — ''Three days will be like too long a time. And, what next step can you think of then ! Instead, will you permit me to conduct an experiment of my own on the body of the Emperor when you admit your failure to cure him ?''

The physicians feel offended at the audacity of Tishya. Her proposal appears to them as astounding.

Vaidyaraj — ''Experiment by you ! Could you ever conceive of such an idea ! Are you competent enough to carry an experiment of your own on the precious body of the Emperor ? Do you possess magical or supernatural power ? Are you thinking of practicing witchcraft on His Majesty's person ? May God show you the path. We have no comment to pass. Better talk to the Prime Minister and the priests and obtain their consent before you do anything dangerous. If anything goes wrong, be aware of the consequences.''

They go out in an angry mood.

Tishya (*to herself*) — ''They want to leave the Emperor's life to his fate ! What will happen if the Emperor passes away ! No, I shall be a dare-devil to cure my Emperor. I love his life more than I love my life.''

She sinks into deeper thoughts.

Scene 3

Same Room — **Tishya, 3 New Vaidyas, A Dozen Royal Guards**

In a serious mood but full of confidence, Tishya imparts her instruction to three new Vaidyas of her choice and a dozen of her trusted guards.

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Tishsya "Go from house to house and knock from door to door all over Pataliputra to find out whosoever is suffering from acute pain in abdomen. Carry them all, young or old, man or woman, to the hall of night guards at the back of the palace and give them beds and food for comfort. Do it today."

The guards leave the place. Tishya turn to the Vaidyas.

Tishya "Please do as I say. I have taken the risk upon myself. It is a desperate attempt on my part to save the precious life of our Emperor. Do collect all types of bitter, sour and hot-tasting herbs and such other objects as cinnamon, garlic and strong spices. Bring your juice-making implements to the hall of patients and stay ready with your attendants."

The Vaidyas look at each other in surprise and depart.

Scene 4

Spacious Hall **Tishya, 15 Patients, 3 Vaidyas, Attendants**

Inside a big hall are lying 15 patients, young and old, suffering from intense abodominal pain. Some are writhing in agony, some are crying aloud, some are delirious. Tishya is moving round from patient to patient. The Vaidyas are busy preparing juice from different types of herbs and pouring into separate pots. Attendants are ready to administer the juice to the patients.

Tishya "Either there are poisonous substances in their belly or some small creatures to create pain. On each patient's mouth let us pour a different type of juice to see if the pain subsides. Each bitter or sour or hot juice may either neutralise the poisonous substances or kill the worms. Let us try."

The attendants carry separate juice cups to each patient and pour down the liquid to each patient's throat. Each one makes the face bitter as the juice is poured. Some cry out, some vomit out the substances because of obnoxious taste or smell.

An Attendant "Madam ! This patient who was crying aloud a moment ago, is now lying still. He is dead."

Tishya comes to the dead patient. She thinks seriously for a moment and turns to the Vaidyas.

Tishya "Vaidyas ! Open up the belly of this patient to see what does it contain. There is no harm using your knife on a dead man's stomach. Bring out the entrails and place it on table."

The Vaidyas open up the belly of the dead and carry its internal part to the table. They are horrified to see big snake-like worms.

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Vaidya "These are snakes, snakes ! They are alive."

Tishya "How many of them ?"

Vaidya "Six in number."

Tishya "On each living creature, pour a separate juice to see the result."

The Vaidyas pour separate liquids on each of the worms and exclaim.

Vaidyas "Madam ! It is the garlic juice which kills a snake instantly. Other liquids do not kill."

An Attendant "Madam ! This patient shows signs of relief after drinking the garlic juice."

Tishya laughs out in joy.

Tishya "I have found it ! I have found the medicine for the King !'

The Vaidyas and a attendants stand amazed.

Scene 5

Asoka's Bedroom **Asoka, Vaidyas, Radhagupta**

Asoka is still lying on his bed in serious condition though relieved of the abdominal pain. The Vaidyas are examining his body and belly.

Vaidyaraj "It is the God's grace that worked like a magic in hands of Tishya Rakshita in saving the life of our Emperor. When we had no other way except offering prayers for divine mercy, she took upon herself the responsibility of treatment like an angel from the Heaven."

Asoka (*in feeble voice*) "The deadly pain is no more. But why am I not able to get up ! Is there no medicine to restore strength in me ?"

Vaidyaraj "It is like a rebirth. An infant does not get up after birth. It needs time. Similarly, after a fatal ailment, Your Majesty should have to wait till bodily strength comes back."

Prime Minister enters.

Radhagupta "There has been no happier moment for us than the moment when sense returned to our Emperor after three days of complete coma. Tishya Rakshita indeed did a job which no one on earth could have dared to do."

Asoka "The Vaidyas ask me not to move. How can I put my seals on the documents you are holding in your hand ?"

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Radhagupta "Your Majesty ! If we have waited for so long, we may also wait for a few days more."

Asoka "If Kunala would have been here, he could have done my work. Did your messengers go to him ?"

Radhagupta "Information has come that the Prince will take some more days to return. His wife, Princess Kanchanamala, is in an advanced stage of pregnancy, waiting for delivery."

Asoka is amazed to hear the words.

Asoka "Kunala's wife ! Kanchanamala !"

Radhagupta "Tishya will talk about it later on. There is no urgency."

Asoka "No urgency ! Yes, I was too near to death to hear things or do my duty. How long can I wait for my son to help me in my royal works ! Well, keep that bundle on my bed. I shall put the seal of approval this very night."

He closes his eyes. Radhagupta keeps the silken bundle on a table and goes out with the Vaidyas.

Scene 6

Night: Asoka's Bedroom **Asoka, Tishya**

Weak and feeble, Asoka is lying on his bed without sleep though it is midnight. Sitting near his head, Tishya is massaging the Emperor's forehead and chest with a sweet-smelling balm. She is also singing in sweet soft voice a song of love.

Asoka "They say, you saved my life from sure death. In what way may I thank you, Tishya, for your devotion and love ?"

Tishya "Aryaputra ! Have I deserved any thanks from you since your Ujjayini days ! I am doing my duty to the one whom I adore and love as a god."

Asoka "Yes, my dear Tishya. You have worked for me selflessly at the risk of grave dangers to your life. I have no words to express my gratitude to you."

Asoka looks to her eyes with feeling.

Tishya "Rajan ! I am thinking, had any danger overtaken you due to my treatment, my head would have rolled by now on the scaffold. But I was ready to die mentally in order to serve my lord. I was almost mad when they gave up hope. And, I acted fearlessly for my master. My work is done. Aryaputra ! Those who were the nearest and the dearest to you remained at a world's distance when death threatened your life. Vidisha

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Devi did not come to you. Karuvaki did not care to come. Kunala forgot of you when you needed him the most. Even your dear friend Yasas did not come from the nearest place. I do not know if this is the go of the world, if this is the nature of human relation !''

She sobs profusely.

Asoka "Tishya ! Do not blame them. Surely, they did not know of my illness or that I was near to death !''

Tishya "When an ant bites a king, people come to say it is a lion ! When a king falls ill, the whole country shakes. Even the clouds or air carry the news from corner to corner.''

Tears drop down from Tishya's eyes and fall on Asoka's breast. He feels of the falling drops.

Asoka "My beloved one ! Are you weeping ?''

Tishya "I am weeping for the malice I have invited from others. They say I am a witch. They say and believe that I saved you by witchcraft.''

Asoka "You have worked like a wife, not as a witch ! I can show to the malicious that you are as dear to me as a queen. Forget of what others say.''

Tishya goes emotional and sobs more desperately.

Tishya "Queen ! Can this wretched maid ever dream of becoming a queen of my beloved Emperor ? But the King's word is as sacrosanct as of a god ! Your Majesty ! Is Tishya in dream to believe what you say ! Am I the queen of Chakravarti Monarch of Bharat, Devanam Priya Priyadarshi Raja Asoka ?''

Asoka feels dumb-founded and perplexed to hear Tishya's words.

Asoka (*in feeble voice*) "Tishya ! Did you hear this sick man correctly of what he said ! If I said I shall make you my queen, I stand by my words. Yes, you are King Asoka's queen right from this moment. May Tathagata forgive this sinner ! I am taking a woman as my queen who saved my life.''

Asoka feels desperate and restless. He looks at Tishya's eyes.

Asoka (*with tears*) "Tishya ! Do remember that a Bhikshu can have no wife in a physical sense. You are my queen in an outer sense - like a comapnion in duty.''

Asoka turns his side to sleep. Tishya's face glows up in happiness and unbounded joy.

Scene 7

Dawn: River **Radhagupta, Palace Maids**

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Radhagupta is taking his bath in the Ganga early in the dawn. To his surprise, he finds at a distance in the river a number of palace maids singing and playing in the water in an obscene manner.

Radhagupta follows the girls to the river ghat and summons one of them to his presence.

Radhagupta "Are you not ashamed of yourself to play in a voluptuous way when the King is in his sickbed ? What has turned you mad ?"

The maid is nervous and fearful.

Maid "Mahamantriji ! Last night the Emperor has accepted our chief maid Tishya Rakshita as his queen. We are enjoying the joy of her elevation."

Radhagupta "Queen ! Chief maid made a queen !"

With an angry face Radhagupta hastens away from the river ghat towards the nearby temple.

Scene 8

Tishya's Apartment **Radhagupta, Tishya**

Wearing gorgeous attire as a queen, Tishya is sitting on a throne in the Queen's apartment. Radhagupta enters into her room.

Radhagupta "Is it all true ! What miracle have you performed on the sick Emperor ? I hope, you have not practiced witchcraft on him ?"

Tishya stands up and looks to Radhagupta with sharp angry eyes.

Tishya "Do you come to challenge the Emperor's decision to make me his queen ?"

Radhagupta "Do not utter that word `queen' ! What will happen to the prestige of the Emperor if he makes a maid his queen ? Could you stoop so low to exploit the King's physical illness and mental weakness of the moment ? Prince Kunala is coming back soon. What punishment would you expect from him for this great deception played on his father ? Are you not afraid of death ? You might have brought some relief to the King by performing a dangerous trick ! Does that make you bold enough to demand a price from the King ? I wish, the Emperor has not lost his mental power to succumb to your demands ! All his greatness will now be shattered with his shattered image as a man !"

Tishya "So many venomous words all at once ! It means, you have not yet realised what Tishya Rakshita is ! Come with me to the Emperor right

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now when I shall remove the mask from your ugly face. Are you not working as an enemy of the King ? Did you not try to set Prince Vitasoka against his brother ? Did you not deceive the Emperor when persuading him to send Kunala away ? Did you not set the chief spy to spread a rumour that Taxila was in revolt after the Prince had left ? Did you not cause thereby distress to the King ? Are you not scheming to keep the Vice-Gerent away to serve your own interest ? When he returns, I as his queen-mother will reveal to him the real character of his Prime Minister. Whose head will then roll on the scaffold, your's or mine ? Please do not forget that we have been partners in a vicious game to serve the interest of the Empire ! If that goal is still in your mind, I am with you in my new role as the Empress of Magadh. If you need my help, I am with you. If you decide to oppose me, you too have to accompany me to the scaffold. The choice lies with you.''

Radhagupta stands dumb and mute.

Scene 9

Asoka's Bedroom **Asoka, Tishya, Radhagupta**

Asoka is weak and feeble, unable to get up. His face is beyond recognition. Radhagupta and Tishya enter into his room.

Radhagupta ''Your Majesty ! I have come to express on behalf of the Council of Ministers our profound happiness on the elevation of Tishya Rakshita to the rank of the queen. Your Majesty needs an active royal consort to help you in every matter. The new queen is highly intelligent and capable. She is deeply devoted to your person. Your Majesty's decision has been widely acclaimed in all quarters.''

Asoka's face indicates no expression or feeling. His eyes are empty and lifeless. He only heaves a sigh.

Asoka ''Soon shall I put my seal of authority on the official orders you have deposited here.''

Radhagupta ''The queen may stamp the seal on your behalf. Yet for some more days, the Vaidyas have restricted the movement of Your Majesty's body.

Asoka ''You told me, Kunala has married. I am glad to hear this. I know, my son can do no wrong. If he has selected his wife and if his wife is expecting a child, I am the happiest man.''

Asoka looks to Tishyas with a smiling face.

Asoka ''Dear Queen ! Send my blessings to Kunala and Kanchanamala and to the unborn child. Ask him to return only when his wife and child can stand the strain of this distant journey, not in a hurry.''

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Radhagupta bows down and goes out. Asoka asks Tishya to come nearer.

Asoka "Open that gold casket that contains my personal Seal. Stamp it on the royal orders and pass them over to the Prime Minister tomorrow. Your own letter of blessings to Kunala may also contain the marks of the Seal to show my happiness at the news of his marriage. Write to him that his old father will like to see a grandson to sit on the throne of Magadh in days to come, even though long after my death."

Tishya shows nervousness for a moment but regains confidence to get up to action. Her hand trembles when she picks up the Imperial Seal from inside the chest.

She puts a sheet on the Emperor's body giving indication to sleep and quietly goes out of the room.

Scene 10

Night: Tishya's Bedroom **Tishya**

Tishya Rakshita is alone in her bedroom. The flickering light shows a face that is sinister. She sits down on a chair near a table. From her waist, she takes out the big Imperial Seal of solid gold, studded with diamonds, with an engraved surface, containing the King's personal insignia. Her face looks more and more demoniac. Her eyes glitter as those of a poisonous snake. She grinds her teeth. She takes out a sheet of white silk from her drawer. She spreads it on the table. She takes up a feather-pen and dips into an ink pot.

She thinks deeply and begins to write. Her hand shakes as she writes. Writing over, she lifts the Seal and presses it on a pad of goldern colour and stamps it with strength at the bottom of the letter.

She put the letter inside a thick leather cover and stitches it tightly and puts gum over its closing points and stamps the seal all over the cover.

Standing up from her chair, she laughs in an abnormal manner for a while. She observes the pale moon through the window and the dark floating clouds in the sky.

She puts off the light and continues to stand at the window, lost in her thought. In darkness, her body appears as a phantom figure in motionless silence.

Scene 11

Three army men on horseback are riding swiftly westward on the highway on their way to Taxila.

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Episode Fifty

Commentary: The Governor of Taxila receives the imperial order to blind Prince Kunala for treason. He finds no reason to disbelieve the order, but finds no courage to carry it out. By a show of examplary conduct, Kunala gets himself blinded and disappears into oblivion.

Scene 1

Taxila: Kanchanamala's Apartment **Kanchanamala, Kunala, Infant, Maids**

Princess Kanchanamala, after the birth of her child, is lying on bed. Maids blow conches. Kunala enters in a happy mood.

Maid "Aryaputra ! It is a son, a beautiful healthy son !"

Kunala and Kanchanamala exchange loving looks with smiling faces.

Kunala "This moment is the happiest moment in the life of both of us."

Maid "It is a happy moment for all. A future emperor is born to rule the earth."

The child continues with its birth-cry.

Scene 2

Night: Governor's Place **Kunala, Governor, Folk Dancers, People**

In the palace of the Taxila Governor, the inmates are celebrating the occasion of the birth of the child. Kunala is seated with the Governor to enjoy the folk dances of Taxila. The Amatyas and guests are assembled in rows to see the function.

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Near at the gate, the Magadhan horsemen from Pataliputra get down and meet the guards. The guards escort one of them to the Governor. The man, in the uniform of an army captain, bows down before the Governor and whispers to his ears.

Magadhan Captain "Your Excellency ! I am carrying for you an urgent message from the Emperor."

Governor "Is it to the Governor or to the Vice-Gerent ?"

Captain "Strictly for the Governor."

Kunala overhears the words of the Captain. The Governor turns to Kunala.

Governor "Kumara-Rajan ! A message from the Emperor has come to me. May I be permitted to receive it in my office ! I shall be back soon."

Kunala (*looking happy*) "It may be for me. Go and receive it and also enquire from the messenger about the health of my father. I shall be soon coming to you."

The Governor gets up and goes. Kunala looks anxious, but turns his attention to the dancers. The programme continues to the cheers of the audience.

Scene 3

Night: Governor's Room **Governor, Magadhan Captain, Kunala**

The Governor comes to his official chamber along with the Magadhan Messenger. Bright torches are burning inside on four corners.

Governor "The Vice-Gerent is anxious to hear from you about the health and activities of his father. You should have better seen the Prince first before coming to me."

Captain "We are under strict orders not to see the Prince. We are further ordered to hand over this most urgent order to you and go back before the Prince talks to us in person. Here is the imperial order, delivered to us by Her Majesty the Empress for presentation to you for your immediate action."

Governor "You mean, Empress Karuvaki !"

Captain "No, it is the new Empress Tishya Rakshita."

The Governor feels puzzled. The Magadhan Captain hands over the sealed bag to the Governor and leaves the room abruptly.

The Governor looks to the seals carefully. He opens the bag and takes out the silken piece containing the order. Sitting on his chair he begins to read the contents. As he reads, his face turns

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grim and his hand trembles. He stands up and reads the letter again while his body shakes violently. He shouts out to himself in uncontrolled emotion.

Governor "No, no, never. Never shall I carry out this brutal and barbarous order. I can never blind this noble and innocent Prince, possessing the soul of a real sage ! He is not a traitor, not involved in treason, does not want to be the King of Taxila ! All these are false charges ! I wonder, if devils have overtaken the rulers in Pataliputra ! I shall take my own life rather than take out the eyes of the Prince !"

In the spur of the moment, he takes out his dagger to stab himself, but falls senseless on the floor, sweating profusely on forehead and grinding his teeth.

Soon enters Kunala to the room. He finds the Governor lying unconscious, holding the imperial order in left hand a dagger in the right hand. Kunala takes out the silk sheet from his hand and before reading it raises his voice to summon the guards. Two guards rush in.

Kunala (*to guards*) "The Governor is unwell. Carefully lift his body and carry him to his bed. Sprinkle water on his face and eyes. I am coming soon."

The guards lift the body of the Governor and quietly go out. Kunala reads the imperial order. His face turns red.

Kunala (*to himself*) "She is now my mother. She is also the Empress. I am her son, also a subject. Her order comes under the seal and insignia of my dear father. O Tathagata, give me the strength to obey my parents and carry out the order. The simple-minded Governor is shocked enough to lose his senses. He need not have to carry out the order when I am his superior, the Vice-Gerent. I shall myself work out the wishes of the reigning Empress as my solemn duty."

Kunala keeps the sheet of silk in his pocket and goes out.

Scene 4

Night: Kanchanamala's Bedroom **Kunala, Kanchanamala, Child**

Lying on her bed, Kanchanamala is feeding milk to the child from her breast. Kunala comes in showing no sign of shock or sorrow. His face is calm and composed.

Kanchanamala "The nurses say the drama and the dance performances were superb."

Kunala "Yes, my dear ! Everything was superb. The whole life is a superb drama, directed by the invisible hands of destiny. Let us enjoy the real drama of life more than the dramas we see. Dear Kanchan, I am leaving

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for a distant mountain to see a holy act before it is dawn. I shall return tomorrow night, may be late in the night. Keep the door open.''

He looks at the beautiful face of his son for several moments.

Kanchanamala ''You are looking at its face without having a twinkle in your eyes for so long a time ! You can see it for endless times in future. It is time for you to go to sleep, my dear !''

Kunala ''Darling ! Nobody knows the future. But as I look to its face, I see the present only - my Samprati. May God give the child a long life.''

Kunala smiles and goes out.

Scene 5

Hilltop **Kunala, Chandala**

Prince Kunala comes to the top of a hill with a ferocious-looking chandala. The latter is sad and horrified, weeping bitterly.

Chandala (*kneeling*) ''My Lord ! Give me mercy by cutting down my head but do not ask me to perform your cruel order.''

Kunala lifts him up, embraces him, and looks sadly at his face.

Kunala ''Dear Friend ! I have brought you here for your kindest gesture towards this condemned man. If you do not do it as a kind friend, I shall die in my own hand in your presence, so that I lose my eyes as well as my life.''

Kunala promptly takes out a dagger from his waist and lifts it upward to cut his own throat when the chandala holds his hand tightly.

Chandala ''Noble Soul ! I shall carry out your command so that your sacred life remains in your body even if the eyes are gone. May God give this wretch the courage to commit this most atrocious act of his life !''

The chandala weeps, offers prayer to God and looks to heavens as Kunala remains seated on a rock like an image of stone.

Kunala ''Friend ! Do your work neatly and perfectly. Let my soul have the solace that some other soul will be happy at my suffering.''

The chandala opens his bag and takes out a thick poisonous thorn. Kunala smiles at him, looks to the sky above and the earth below, and opens his both eyes with his own fingers of both the hands. Nervous to his depth and with shaking hands, the chandala pierces the thorn into Kunala's both eyes as the

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Prince cries out in severe agony. His cries echo round the hill and reverberates across the thin air.

Scene 6

Night : Kanchanamala' Bedroom **Kanchanamala, Kunala, Child**

Kunala enters into Kanchanamala's room to find her and the child sleep. His eyes are bandaged showing blood marks on the cloth. Looking like a chandala in torn and shabby dress, he comes in slow steps and puts his hand on Kanchanamala's body searching it out in deep darkness and without eyesight. The Princess springs up in surprise to find a stranger near her bed.

Kanchanamala "Who are you so near to me ?"

Kunala "It is the same Kunala with the same soul, enriched with an inner vision though deprived of the outer eyes."

Kanchanamala looks at Kunala's face and sinks unconscious to her bed. Kunala bends over her body.

Scene 7

Night : Same Room **Child, Maids**

Alarmed at the continuous cries of the infant, several maids rush in and find the bed of Kanchanamala empty. On the pillow they find an open letter.

Scene 8

Governor's Apartment **Governor, Magadhan Captain, Tishya's Agents**

The Governor, perturbed and fearful, is sitting on a chair with nervous breakdown. The Magadhan Captain and the former agents of Tishya who came with the Prince to Taxila are standing ground him.

Captain "Your Excellency ! In your interest, you should not intimate to the Emperor anything about his order to blind the Prince. Since you have not carried out the order, you need not raise that issue before anybody."

1st Agent "On the other hand, you are required to send your message in your own handwriting that the Prince with his wife has fled away in fear of the Emperor's wrath for having married to a lady without his father's consent."

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2nd Agent "It will be better if without giving any reason for the disappearance of the Prince and the Princess, you may just inform the Emperor that both of them have left Taxila for unknown destinations."

The nervous Governor turns his eyes from face to face and continues to nod his head thoughtlessly.

An Amatya of Taxila comes in.

Amatya "The soldiers have combed the mountains and the hills, human settlements and tribal villages, dense forests and jungles, but there is no trace of the Prince and his wife. Nobody has seen them anywhere within farthest distances around Taxila."

Governor "Friends ! I cannot hear anything, cannot think anything, cannot speak anything, cannot do anything ! I can only die in order to escape this tragedy ! Please tell me, what shall I do with this precious child, a future emperor of Bharat !"

Amatya "The safest and the best thing for you to do is to take the child to Pataliputra and hand it over to his grandfather, the Emperor."

Governor "Yes, I shall take him in utmost care to the King at the earliest. May God preserve the child to who his mother has liked to call Samprati."

Scene 9

Pataliputra: Asoka's Apartment **Asoka, Radhagupta, Taxilan Governor, Child Samprati**

Fully recovered from sickness, Asoka is attending to his duties in his audience hall when Radhagupta comes in to break the news of Kunala's disappearance.

Radhagupta "Your Majesty ! A great tragedy has overtaken us. I have to break the shocking news to you that Prince Kunala has disappeared with his wife from the palace of Taxila and is not to be traced out yet. The Governor of Taxila, Kunjara Karna, has brought to Pataliputra Prince Kunala's son with utmost care."

Asoka gets up and stands stunned.

Asoka "Are not my evil days over yet ! Is not it the Will of the Tathagata that I go out as a Bhikshu, leaving my Empire to Kunala !"

Radhagupta "Your Majesty ! I have already taken steps to search out the Prince. I hope, now that his son has been brought to the palace, its parents will appear before you soon."

Asoka "Bring my grandson to my presence. Order the generals to spare no efforts to find out the Prince and the Princess."

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Governor Kunjara Karna comes in with the child in his hands. Asoka extends his arms and receives the child with utmost affection. The Governor kneels down before the Emperor with folded hands.

Asoka "A day will come when the destiny of the Mauryan dynasty will rest in the hands of this child. May it be placed in charge of Tishya Rakshita to grow up under her affection and care."

Radhagupta looks thoughtful.

Radhagupta "The child is too young to be left to the care of a reigning queen. Let my wife and my daughter keep the child in their charge in my house. They will bestow their maximum affection and attention on the babe."

Asoka hands over the child to Radhagupta who passes him on to the waiting maids. Asoka looks to Kunjara Karna who is still in his kneeling posture.

Asoka "Kunjara Karna ! I sent Kunala to Taxila for a brief time to assure the people of the frontiers about my noble intentions. But he was held up because of your disloyal activities verging upon a revolt ! Have you no shame in you to come to my presence after you have ruined the peace of my mind. I wonder, why the Prince did not order for your execution once he detected your mischief ! God knows where he has gone and why ! You wretch, you have done the maximum harm to your King. Go out of my sight."

Kunjara Karna puts his head on the feet of the Emperor, and lifts his face after a few moments.

Kunjara Karna "Your Majesty ! Curse me, kill me, do to me as you like. But the noble Prince saw Taxila in peace and saw me as his most loyal and obedient slave. Satisfied with my achievements and works, he sent reports to Your Majesty again and again that it was all quiet on Taxilan territory and that all rumours about trouble were baseless and false. Yet, my Emperor, I am here to give my head if I am a suspect."

Asoka turns to Radhagupta.

Asoka "Mahamantri ! How could it come to my ears that Kunjara Karna was in revolt ! How could it pass that he was in league with the foreigners ! If there was nothing like that, there was no reason for me to keep dear Kunala at that distant place ! My world is ruined because he stayed there longer. What happened to his reports to me. I received no communication from him since he left the palace. I wonder, if it is the result of a conspiracy. But whose hand can be there behind the mischiefs ? I have no enemies at the moment, inside or outise."

Radhagupta becomes apprehensive.

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Radhagupta "I shall investigate into the matter."

Asoka "Matters are serious. Find out the culprits. Have the spies stopped functioning ? Let Kunjara Karna help you to discover the basis of rumours. Whosoever is responsible, bring him to book."

The Emperor orders Kunjara Karna to get up and go.

Scene 10

Night : Asoka's Bedroom **Asoka, Tishya**

Instead of going to bed, Asoka stands near the window and observes the stars in the sky. Tishya comes in.

Tishya "Rajan ! I came to see if you have gone to your sleep. The physicians still persist that sleeplessness will prove harmful."

Asoka heaves a deep sigh.

Asoka "Can I sleep in peace when my mind will wander across the space to find my son in imagination. My mind will feel tormented in the silence of every night. Dear Tishya, can Asoka live in peace when his son is missing ! Why did he disappear, where did he go with his young wife, in what state of mind and for whom ? No, I cannot think of anything. May Buddha protect him ! May He bring back my Kunala to his unfortunate father ! I shall donate away all my possessions to invoke the mercy of the Lord."

Tishya quietly leaves the room.

Scene 11

Mountain Cave **Kunala, Kanchanamala**

In a dense forest at the foot of the Vindya mountains Kunala and Kanchanamala are seen inside a cave in dress of beggars.

Kunala "Kanchan ! Prince Gautama left the palace and wandered from forest to forest in search of the Truth. He was alone. We two have come out of our earthly abodes of power and pleasure in search of happiness. The Lord is granted it to us. He has given to us the inner happiness of existence. He guides us to cross the river of *karma* to find our path for salvation."

Kanchanamala "I wish, I too should lose my outer eyes to see things by inner vision. May God bless me with blindness !"

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Kunala "When you see this cave as pleasant as the apartment of a queen, when you find in your beggar's dress the apparels of an empress, and when you share the misfortunes of an unfortunate husband with smiles of satisfaction, you are already in possession of your spiritual eyes. These inner eyes of my dear wife will lead me further towards salvation while your physical eyes will take me from place to place as long as our journey continues."

Kanchanamala takes out her flute and places it in hands of Kunala.

Kanchanamala "Now, my dear, play the flute to the tune as I taught you last time."
Kunala plays the flute in an enchanting way till Kanchanamala falls asleep. A tribal woman enters into the cave with a basketful of ripe fruits and places the basket near them.

Storm breaks out in the forest as clouds roar in the sky and thunders fall. Unmindful of Nature's fury, Kunala plays his flute deep into night.

Scene 12

Asokarama Monastery **Asoka, Bhikshus and Pilgrims**

Sitting outside the monastery of Asokarama, Asoka is seen distributing gold and silver pieces to numerous Bhikshus and pilgrims, coming line after line. On an open space nearby, Yasas is supervising the feeding of thousands of the poor and the needy, destitutes and beggars. Monks and nuns are chanting hymns ceaselessly.

The Cycle of Time turns several rounds as Asoka's donations continue.

Scene 13

Radhagupta's Garden **Radhagupta, Samprati, Soldier**

Six-year old Samprati, son of Prince Kunala, is playing with the aged Prime Minister inside a garden. Radhagupta asks the boy to shoot at a bird, flying in the sky. Samprati aims his arrow perfectly and brings down the bird to earth. A soldier comes in with swords and shields in hand. Samprati learns the art of swordplay from him. Radhagupta claps to encourage the young Prince as he fights with the soldier.

Radhagupta "Dear Prince ! I want you to be as great a fighter as Chandragupta Maurya when you come of age."

Samprati "This night I shall hear from you the story of that king."

Radhagupta lifts the boy to his shoulder in a jovial mood.

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Scene 14

Night : Tishya's Bedroom **Tishya**

Walking up and down in her bedroom in the night, Tishya is muttering her thoughts to herself.

Tishya "Accursed I am as a woman being barren. Gods have cursed me as the wife of a Bhikshu who does not need me as a wife. What for my beauty and charm if they do not attract a husband to lust ! What use being an empress is no son from my womb is born to be an emperor ! The sorcerers say, I have to propitiate a goddess to get a son. They ask me to sacrifice a boy on the cremation ground in a newmoon night ! Should I try this in hope of having a son ! I can never see this Samprati on throne when Asoka departs his mortal body."

Her face turns dangerously terrible as she mutters the name of Samprati again and again.

Scene 15

Bank of Ganga : A hut **Kunala, Kanchanamala**

Inside a small hut on the bank of river Ganga, Kunala and Kanchanamala are seen as beggars. As the full moon rises on the horizon, they go out towards the river bank. At a secluded corner of the bank, not far from the imperial palace, they sit down on a rock. While Kanchanamala is lost in the sight of the beauties of Ganga in the moonlight, Kunala takes up his flute and begins to play on it.

The sweet melody of the flute floats over the serene silence of the night to far distances. The moon reigns over the midsky. Kunala goes on playing his flute.

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Episode Fifty-One

Commentary: A time comes at last when Asoka recognises his blind son Kunala while Tishya Raskhita burns herself to death. As the last years of his life approach, Asoka's generosity reaches its climax. The Ministers try to put up the boy Samprati as the Vice-Gerent.

Scene 1

Fullmoon Night: Bank of Ganga **Kunala, Kanchanamala**

At a forlorn place on the bank of river Ganga, Kunala is sitting on a rock with Kanchanamala near him. It is a fullmoon night. The atmosphere is calm and serene. The river glistenes under the reflection of the moon. Kunala goes on playing his flute endlessly. The sweet meldoy of the flute sounds etherial as it penetrates deep into the sky.

Scene 2

Same Night: Palace Roof **Asoka, Maid**

Asoka is seen on the roof of the Maurya Palace deeply absorbed in thought. He observes the fullmoon in the sky and looks to the glistening water on the Ganga. He stands motionless and listens to the sweet music floating from a far distance in the quietness of the midnight.

Asoka's rapt attention is disturbed when a maid appears of the roof.

Maid "It is midnight. It is time to return and retire to bed."

Asoka "One sleeps every night. But it is worth spending some nightly hours in listening to the sweet music coming from nowhere. As long as it continues, so long shall I stand to listen."

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Maid "Your Majesty ! The flute-player can be summoned to the palace any time to present his performance."

Asoka "Yes, I would like to hear it. Send the guards to the bank to ask the flute-player to come to the palace tomorrow evening."

The maid goes away. Asoka remains standing. The music continues to reach his ears.

Scene 3

Same Night : River Bank **Kunala, Kanchanamala, Guards**

Kanchanamala finds in fear two persons coming towards them in quick steps. She whispers to Kunala.

Kanchanamala "Two men are coming towards us. Let us leave the place."

Kunala "Let them come, we have nothing to fear or lose."

The two guards reach the spot.

1st Guard "You lucky man ! The Emperor has heard your sweet flute from the palace roof. He has liked it. He has invited you to the palace tomorrow evening to play your flute before him."

Kunala "Can a blind beggar come to the palace and even to the presence of the Emperor !"

2nd Guard "Without seeing you, he has liked your music. He may feel much more happy to hear your flute in his presence. You may even be luckier to receive rewards. If he feels impressed, he may make you a court-musician."

Kunala (*smiling*) "A blind beggar becoming a courtier !"

Kanchanamala "Dear friends, we need no reward. We play the flute to please others, not for gain. We cannot disobey the King's order to come to him. But, I shall take my husband to the palace on one condition, namely, he will play his flute only in the presence of King Asoka. No other person, not even the queen, shall be present there to hear his music."

Kunala and Kanchanamala get up and walk away. The guards walk towards the palace.

Scene 4

Night : Asoka's Apartment **Asoka, Kunala, Kanchanamala**

Inside his private apartment adjacent to bedroom, Asoka is reclining on a couch. Sitting at a

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near distance together with Kanchanamala, Kunala gets ready to play his flute. He is blind with disfigured eyes, has a delicate beard and long hair on head. His clothes are shabby, his bare body covered with a torn garment. Kanchanmala's face is painted with ashes, hiding her fair complexion and bodily beauty. Her cloth is torn but clean.

Kunala begins playing his flute. In the light of the burning torches, his face looks bright. Asoka's eyes turn tearful as he listens to the music emanating from Kunala's flute. Moments pass by. At last, Kunala removes his flute from the lips.

Asoka — "Dear flute-player ! I have never heard such sweet music before. I would like to hear it again and again if you like to please your King."

Kanchanamala — "Your Majesty ! Nobody can disobey the King's order and certainly not this blind man !"

Asoka observes the face of Kanchanamla with a feeling of pity.

Asoka — "Is your noble husband blind from his birth ? If so, how unkind is God to deny eyesight to a person who is endowed with a divine quality !"

Kunala — "No, Your Majesty. I am not born-blind. My eyes were robbed by men to serve the purpose of God."

Asoka — "Robbed by men ! For the purpose of God ! What do you mean by this, my dear young man ?"

Kunala — "Yes, Your Majesty, my eyes have been robbed not by robbers but by the mightiest among all men on this earthly realm. It was God's kindness that by losing my physical eyes, I got the spiritual vision to see the transient character of this mundane world."

Kunala sobs. Asoka feels sad, but curious to hear.

Asoka — "Who can be the mightiest of men except the King of the realm ? And, in the realm of this Third Maurya, there is no such thing as the robbing of the eyes at the King's order ! Also, no officer of the realm can ever venture to inflict such inhuman punishment to any man ! Dear young man, tell me your story - who cursed you to this misery and for what offence ?"

Kunala sobs, unable to answer.

Kanchanamala — "Devanam Priya Priyadarshi Rajan ! There is no need in recounting the story of man's misery if it does not serve any good. Everyone, even the mightiest and the all-powerful, is only a creature of destiny ! If destiny wanted this man to be blinded, even a king becomes an instrument in hands of that inscrutable destiny. I pray, we may now be allowed to leave."

Asoka — "There is something hidden behind your wise words. If destiny has caused you this misery, it is the same destiny that might have brought

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you to King Asoka yet for some other purpose. My noble daughter, tell me who you are. The voice of your husband comes to me as an echo of a voice dearest to my heart. Tell me, who are you.''

Asoka gets up from his couch, comes near to Kunala, lifts him up from floor and observes his face with penetrating eyes.

Asoka ''Speak my boy, speak again. May I hear your voice once more !''

Kunala wants to speak but Kanchanamala puts her palm on the lips of her husband.

Kanchanamala ''Rajan ! Let not the forgotten and the lost voice be heard again. Let not the echo of a dead past bring back to the mind of my husband the memories of a beloved one who loved him so dearly, but yet... !''

Asoka by now is looking at the face of Kunala from the closest point. In a flash of vision, he suddenly finds the old face of Prince Kunala superimposed on the face of the blind Kunala. Overwhelmed with emotion he bursts into weeping.

Asoka ''Kunala, my dear son, am I alive to see you in this shape ? Could not have death taken me to the other world to spare me of this painful sight ?''

He embraces Kunala deeply and kisses on his head. But he loses his selfcontrol and begins to shake in anger.

Asoka ''Tell me, my son, who has caused you this misery. Is it that monster of a man, Kunjara Karna ? I shall annihilate each and all who have robbed you of your eyesight. I shall know no mercy, no pity, no kindness, no forgiveness !''

Asoka stands trembling in rage.

Kunala ''Dear Father ! For sake of your beloved Kunala, kindly give up your *krodha* which is the worst of all the *ripus*. Anger leads to suspicion which is a sin. It is not Kunjara Karna, but the one to whom nobody can suspect. But, yet, the one who became an instrument of destiny to cause your son this pain.''

Asoka looks serious and thoughtful.

Asoka ''I cannot make out who this individual can be. I cannot imagine what prompted him to commit this wanton crime. I appeal to you as a man and I command to you as a king to disclose to me the name who ruined your life, my life, and the future of the Mauryan dynasty ! His identity should be known for sake of the eternal Dharma that holds the earth.''

Kunala ''Father ! For sake of the Dharma, too, I can disclose the truth. But, I pray for your solemn promise that you shall have no malice or anger, no

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hatred or dislike towards the one who became the destiny's agent to bring upon me this *karmic* suffering. And, that you shall love that person as ever before.''

Asoka (*soft voice*) ''Kunala ! You have gone far ahead of your father in thoughts spiritual. As a blind beggar you have come nearer to self-realisation whereas I am far behind, though putting on a spiritual garb. Well, if you have forgiven your enemy, I too may grant my mercy to him.''

Kunala takes out a torn bag from his shoulder and brings out a piece of silk cloth, neatly folded and carefully kept. He hands it over to Asoka. The Emperor unfolds it, looks to the seals, and goes through its contents.

In moments, Asoka's face looks abnormal. His eyes turn wild. He shivers. He raises his voice forgetful of himself.

Asoka ''Tishya Rakshita ! My Queen, my Empress ! O you woman, you wretch, what mischief are you not capable of !''

He reaches at a sword hanging on the wall. As he takes it out, Kanchanamala holds his hand.

Kanchanamala ''Rajan ! Do you forget your promise to your beloved son ?''

Asoka (*in rage*) ''No dear daughter ! I lift this sword not to cut down the head of Tishya Rakshita, but to cut down the head of Emperor Asoka ! Leave me to perform my duty as a king. Leave me to do justice to myself as an upholder of Dharma !''

Kanchanamala takes out the sword from Asoka's grip.

Scene 5

Outside the Room **Tishya Rakshita**

Outside the apartment of Asoka is seen the motionless shadow of Tishya Rakshita in deep darkness. The shadow moves away suddenly and disappears into the dark.

Scene 6

Same Night : Tishya's Bedroom **Tishya**

In lightening swiftness Tishya Rakshita enters into her room and puts off the burning lamps all except one. In faint moonlight coming through the window, her shadowy figure is seen moving around for some moments. She pours ghee unto her dress and takes up the lamp to her breast and moves it around her garments. In a moment, she glows up into a burning flame and falls to the floor.

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Scene 7

Forest : Hermitage **Ascetic, Yasas, Kunala**

Inside a rock-cut cave in a dense forest, a holy ascetic is busy offering prayers before the image of a goddess. Yasas and Kunala are seated in a corner as the ascetic performs his holy rites. Having finished his work, he looks to the visitors to hear them.

Yasas "Revered Holy Man ! Seated before you is Prince Kunala, the son of Emperor Asoka. We have come to invoke your spiritual power to return his eyesight to him. When human power proves fruitless, it is only the spiritual power that comes to the help of the unfortunate. We pray to you for your mercy."

The ascetic looks to the face of Kunala and asks questions to the Prince.

Ascetic "Noble Prince ! I know about your misfortune. Now, tell me the truth. Did you ever feel angry with your step-mother who caused you this distress ?"

Kunala "Holy Father ! I did not."

Ascetic "If you had no malice or anger or sorrow in your mind, you may be a fit person for spiritual healing. But there is also a method of treatment in this case. Here is a pot that is sacred and sanctified. It has to be filled with the tears of a pure soul whose every drop of tear will come out of devotion. When the pot will be full, *mantras* will work on it. The sanctified tears will then be sprinkled on the eyes of the Prince. If the tears are not the product of devotion to the Goddess, they will not work as medicine. Further more, the Prince should not know whose tears are contained in the pot. He can know of the donor if only he regains the eyesight. Go and find out a pure soul to shed tears before the Goddess to cure an unfortunate man."

He hands over the holy pot to Yasas and goes out of the cave.

Scene 8

Night : Cave **Kanchanamala**

Sitting alone on hard rock before the image of the Goddess inside the dark cave, Kanchanamala holds the sacred pot before her eyes. Looking towards the image in the dim light of an earthen lamp, she begins to sing the songs of devotion as tears roll down her eyes and fall on the pot. Forgetful of time she goes on singing and weeping till the pot is full with her tears, and the ascetic comes in to take it from her hands.

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Kanchanamala goes out quietly under a veil. The ascetic utters mantras *on the pot and orders Kunala to come in. He sprinkles the tears on his eyes again and again while chanting the* mantras *looking at the Goddess.*

As the dawn descends, Kunala recovers eyesight partly to see the image as also the face of the ascetic.

Kunala "Holy Father ! I see the Goddess and your holy face. Who is this donor whose tears could bring back my lost eyesight ?"

Ascetic "Who else can it be except Kanchanamala !"

Kunala kneels down to offer prayers to the Goddess. The ascetic places his hand on the head of the Prince and utters the holy mantras.

Scene 9

Asoka's Apartment **Asoka, Kunala, Kanchanamala, Radhagupta, Samprati (Aged 8)**

Asoka's joy knows no bounds to see Kunala regaining his eyesight. He looks at the face of Kanchanamala with eyes of deep affection.

Asoka "Dear daughter, if Kunala survived through the ordeals of distress, it was for you and you alone. May Tathagata lead you on the path of Dharma to reach the ultimate goal."

Radhagupta comes in with boy Samprati with him.

Radhagupta "May I now hand over Prince Samprati to his parents at this moment of your supreme Happiness."

Kanchanamala embraces Samprati. Kunala lifts the boy to his bosom.

Asoka "Mahamantri ! Now that the Vice-Gerent is back in the palace, I shall hand over the reins of administration to his hands and go out as a recluse. May I now become a true Bhikshu instead of working as a Bhikshu-Gatika. No longer can I live in the palace when a hermitage is the place for my living."

Radhagupta "Your Majesty ! An Emperor cannot appear as a beggar. Neither the ministers nor the subjects will like to see their Chakravarti living like a beggar."

Kunala "Father ! I am one with the Prime Minister on this point. Your mission to preach the Dharma and to educate the humanity for a moral life is yet to reach its culminating height. As for me, I am yet to regain my full

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eyesight. Since it is a miracle-healing, I am advised to dedicate my life to the service of the sick and the distressed. In right time, I shall take up my responsibility as the Vice-Gerent, not now.''

Asoka looks to Kunala with a feeling of compassion.

Radhagupta — ''I find an answer to the problem. The Devanam Priya may live like a Bhikshu, but rule like an Emperor. Prince Kunala may take charge of the gigantic and endless welfare works all over the empire. And, Prince Samprati, though young yet highly gifted and precocious, may work as the Vice-Gerent under the guidance of the Emperor and the ministers.''

Kunala — ''The Prime Minister's proposal is full of meaning. Let Samprati grow up as a future emperor right from this age when my revered father, the wise Prime Minister, and his father will all work together to train him up.''

Asoka — ''Let the Will of tt Lord be served. From today let Asoka live like a Bhikshu in a cottage to prepare his path for salvation.''

Radhagupta — ''Your Majesty ! May the Bhikshu-Emperor live in a cottage as he likes. But may this hermitage be erected within the compound of the palace, not anywhere outside.''

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Episode Fifty-Two

Commentary: Ordained as a Bhikshu, Emperor Asoka decides to give away all his wealth to the Buddhist Sangha. Behaving like a Bhikshu, he himself begs from house to house like Gautama Buddha in the past. As the aged Emperor enters into the last days of his life, Prince Samprati as the Vice-Gerent ventures to oppose the reckless charity of his grandfather. Asoka at last breathes his last having fulfilled his great mission on earth.

Scene 1

Asoka's Hermitage **Asoka, Yasas, Karuvaki**

Within the compound of the Maurya Palace, there now stands a newly erected cottage to accommodate Asoka. The interior presents a look of extreme austerity. On the hard surface of the floor, are seated on a mat Asoka, Yasas and Karuvaki. At a distance are seen some monks.

Asoka "How happy do I feel to hear from Karuvaki that the hill tribes of inaccessible forests, whether in Kalinga or in the Nepal Tarai, are embracing the religion of the Buddha ! How much happy do I feel to hear that an entire people of the Island of Simhala have embraced Buddhism ! So are doing the people of Brahma Desh and Suvarnadwipa, and of Kamboja and Siam. How much happy do I feel to hear that the Yavana Kings Antiyoka, Turamaya, Antikini, Maga and Alikasundara have accepted the principles of peace and human brotherhood with immense delight ! It is now my desire to work as a Bhikshu as did Gautama Buddha himself. I shall beg from house to house to collect alms for the Sangha. May not a moment of life be wasted as long as the life lasts in me."

Karuvaki "Devanam Priya ! This cottage is the shelter of Bhikshu Asoka. But it is also the house of the Emperor of Bharatavarsha. I have ordered the attendants to place in this room the throne, the crown, the sceptre and the other emblems of royalty."

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The attendants enter into the spacious shelter and place inside it the throne, etc., and go out.

Asoka — "Let it be so. I have ordered my officers to come to me at any time of the day or the night, whether I am awake or asleep. There is no higher duty than the welfare of the people. `And what little efforts I make, what is it for ? In order that I may be free from debt to the creatures, that I may render some happy here and that they may gain heaven in the next world'."

Yasas — "Rajan ! I hoped, Prince Kunala and Kanchanamala would stay in the palace to assist you in royal duties. But, they are away. How can Your Majesty go out on your begging-mission leaving the affairs of the state in charge of a child, I mean, Samprati !"

Asoka — "My ministers and officers are there to work the hardest way. Whether I am here or anywhere, there shall be no relaxation of duty on their part. I expect them to work as hard as I do."

The monks begin to chant hymns.

Scene 2

Army Ground — **Radhagupta, Samprati (Aged 10), Generals**

On an open ground in front of the Army Academy, Radhagupta and 3 Generals observe Young Prince Samprati undergoing military training. The Prince competes with cavariers in their race on horseback. He excells in other arts of warfare. When he returns to the Prime Minister and the Generals, they bow their heads before him.

Radhagupta — "Dawn heralds the day. In the morning of your life we find in you a born soldier !"

Samprati — "Guru Dev ! Ancestor Chandragupta was trained and taught by Acharya Chanakya. I am being trained and taught by Mahamati Radhagupta."

General — "We will take you now to *Vihara-Yatra* to hunt the wild animals."

Samprati — "Senapati ! My grandfather has asked me not to kill any creature. How can I kill tigers and lions ?"

Radhagupta — "Dear Samprati ! Forget whatever your grandfather said. We want to teach you the *Raja-Dharma* not the Dharma of the Buddha. You are our future emperor. You are required to believe in the virtues of kingship. You should learn to love battles and wars, conquests and invasions. You have to rule as a king. You have to become a mighty warrior. You cannot afford to believe in the policies of peace and non-violence. Your coming days will be different from the days of your grandfather. Kings will come and go while the kingdom will exist for ever. It will exist on

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the foundations of the traditional virtues of kingship. Think of King Ramachandra who was a God. But he too had to fight against the sins of Ravana, the Rakshasa King. A righteous king should have to fight for righteous causes. You cannot escape that duty. Your grandfather may be an exception.''

Samprati ''Guru Dev ! I shall be a king, not a Bhikshu.''

Radhagupta and the Generals express happiness to hear the Prince.

Scene 3

Village Roads **Asoka, Monks**

Walking on bare feet in the garb of a beggar, Asoka moves from house to house through a rural settlement begging for the Sangha. Buddhist monks follow him, singing songs of religion and also begging from door to door in the village.

At a place, a poor old woman who has nothing in her hut, throws away her cloth from behind her half-closed door to the royal beggar, and promptly hides her body.

At another place, a wife requests her husband with tearful eyes to go to the village money-lender and borrow some money on assurance that she will work as a maid-servant in his house to repay the loan, taken for paying as alms to the King.

Yet another place, a group of women throw handfuls of rice on the King's begging bowl.

Scene 4

Village Ground **Asoka, Monks, People**

At the end of the begging for the day, Asoka initiates the villagers to the religion of the Buddha. In a congregation of monks and village-folks, he makes his announcement of a decision.

Asoka ''If the poorest of the poor in the villages could give alms to me for the sake of the Sangha, why should I not give away everything I have in my possession as a king - my throne, my crown, my gold ornaments and jewels, and my gold vessels ? Let me announce it for the information of the Buddhist fraternity that I shall offer 96 crores to the Sangha in several instalments for its maintenance and growth.''

The monks and people shed tears to hear the Emperor.

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Scene 5

Palace **Samprati, Radhagupta, 5 Ministers, Treasurer**

Inside the Vice-Gerent's Official apartment, Samprati receives Radhagupta and 5 ministers to discuss the affairs of administration. The Treasurer stands behind the ministers with a fearful face.

Radhagupta "Uparajan ! We are shocked to hear about the Emperor's latest announcement and order. He has decided to donate 96 crores to the Sangha from the royal treasury. The treasurer has already released some money. We appeal to you to stop such payments. Unless you interfere to check the Emperor's wishes, the administration will suffer badly. Money is the basis of administration."

Samprati looks to the treasurer.

Treasurer "Your Honour ! Four instalments have already been paid."

Samprati "This should stop. I have learnt it from the *Shastras* that `As the Sun sucks water from the oceans as vapours to send it back to the earth in form of rains to make it rich with crops, so does a king takes tax from the people to spend it for their good and for protecting country'. The revenues of an entire population cannot be handed over to a non-working group of parasites. I order you, therefore, not to release any further amount of money to the Sangha."

The ministers express delight to hear the Vice-Gerent.

Scene 6

Palace Gate **Samprati, Brahmans**

While returning from Vihara-Yatra *on horseback, Prince Samprati finds a large number of Brahmans waiting for him at the gate of the palace, under the leadership of the chief priest.*

Chief Priest "We have come to our future sovereign and the present Uparajan to present our grievance."

Samprati "Speak out what have you to say freely and frankly. I have been taught by the Emperor to hear the grievances of the people at any time and anywhere and directly from them. Do speak out."

Cheif Priest "Uparajan ! We the Brahmans and the priests stand before you on behalf of the Brahmans and priests of Bharatavarsha. Our ageless established privileges are being taken out by the latest rules of the government. Firstly, a ban on animal sacrifice denies us our traditional modes of worship. Secondly, the Emperor's decree declaring `Equality of all Castes

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before Law' removes our Brahmanical privileges of immunity against certain penalties and punishments. How can we live in the country when our age-old social status is reduced to dust ? We beg for justice.''

Samprati — ''I understand what you say. I shall think over it. I shall discuss this issue with the Emperor.''

Crowd — ''No, no. We seek justice from you here and now.''

Samprati (*agitated*) — ''If you are conscious of your social status, do not forget also the political status of an Uparajan. I resent your voices of protest. I ask you to disperse with dignity as priests and pundits.''

Samprati rides through the gate. The crowd melts away quickly.

Scene 7

Treasury — **Treasurer, Yasas, Monks**

Before the treasurer stands Yasas with three monks with bags in hand to collect money.

Treasurer — ''I am helpless. The Vice-Gerent has ordered me not to release any further instalment of money to the Sangha. I do not know what fate awaits this unfortunate creature! I appeal to you to go away.''

Yasas and the monks look blank and return from the door of the treasury sad and depressed.

Scene 8

Emperor's Audience Hall — **Samprati, Ministers, Asoka**

Inside the imperial audience hall, Vice-Gerent Samprati is seen on the throne of the Emperor to conduct his business. Seated before the Prince are Radhagupta and 10 ministers.

Samprati — ''It has come to my ears that a group of monks under Yasas carried a complaint to the Emperor against the treasurer who is now hiding for his life. Let some of you go to the Emperor to say that the poor officer was carrying out the order of the Vice-Gerent who is acting under the advice of the council of ministers.''

The ministers look at each other in fearful silence. Trumpets are heard at the door unexpectedly, signifying the coming of the Emperor. Soon enters Asoka in the garb of a beggar and walks to the throne. Ministers stand up and bow their heads. Samprati vacates the throne, bows down, and shows his hands to Asoka to come to the throne. Asoka takes the throne with Samprati on his thigh.

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Asoka "Mahamantri and the Mahamatyas ! I want to hear from you, who is the reigning Emperor of the Mauryan Empire ?"

Ministers feel nervous.

Ministers (*in one voice*) "Your Majesty is the Emperor."

Asoka "Are you true to the words you have just uttered ? Try to search your soul and find out the answer -- are you sincere to your Emperor ? Are you honest enough to uphold the principles and ideals of your Emperor ? Have you truly tried to appreciate Asoka's concept of Dharma ? Of his ideas about morality, virtue, peace and non-violence ? If you have no vision to see the results of these experiments, you are still living in the days of your forefathers ! My works should not stop. If you use my grandson to serve your purpose, you are doing justice neither to yourself not to him. If you want to defeat my desire to donate 96 crores to the Sangha, I can defeat your intention by donating the whole Empire to the Buddhist Order. Yes, I donate my Empire to the cause of my mission. Let the Empire of Bharat be dedicated to the cause of universal peace, for the foundation of a world order, binding all men in spiritual bond."

Asoka gets up, places Samprati on the throne, and goes out as abruptly as he came. The ministers stands up and bow down, looking puzzled and confused.

Samprati "How can my *Pitamaha* donate the Empire which belonged to my ancestors, which belongs to me, and which belongs to my successors ? What can the monks do with a territory with a sea of humanity ?"

He smiles.

Samprati "Leave this problem to me. I shall deal with these monks when they come to demand the Empire as donation !"

Ministers "We leave it to you how to save your Empire."

Scene 9

Asokarama Monastery **Monks, Nuns, 100 Brahmans, Yasas, Sramana (Boy Monk)**

Early in the morning, groups of monks and nuns are going out from the monastery with empty begging bowls to beg for the day. As they go out, one hundred Brahmans enter into the compound in a silent procession. They reach the verandah where Yasas is seen seated with a boy monk of tender age in posture of meditation. Yasas opens his eyes and finds to his surprise a crowd of Brahmans.

Yasas "Venerable Wisemen ! Be pleased to take your seats and be pleased to tell me the reason of your visit."

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The Brahmans sit down on the floor in lines.

1st Brahman "Sthavira ! You know, Devanam Priya Priyadarshi Raja Asoka regards all men as equal. He grants money lavishly to your Asokarma Monastery. You feed thousands of people everday. But you feed only the Buddhists. This is not the intention of the noble King. We the hundred Brahmans have come to your monastery today to share the meals with the Buddhists. We ask you to make arrangements for us."

2nd Brahman "We are hungry. As you know, we are eaters. We can cook the meat ourselves while your men may cook the rest of the items for us."

Sramana "We do not kill animals, as you know."

3rd Brahman "You are so young and so lovely. We do not mind if your meat is served to us. And, we can cut your beautiful body to pieces of meat like Data Karna of the Mahabarat who could cut his own tender son to pieces to feed his holy guest."

The Sramana smiles while Yasas feels annoyed to understand the evil motive of the Brahmans.

Sramana "I may offer my life with the greatest pleasure to satisfy your hunger for my meat. But, I have one request. Before I am slaughtered, I want to eat a delicious meal as the last meal of my life. Any one of you can kindly cook the meal for me."

1st Brahman "Yes, yes, we can prepare for you a very delicious dish with rice and ghee, candy and milk, and cook for you several items of curry with spices. Take us to your kitchen, show to us your stores of rice, ghee and vegetables."

The boy-monk gets up with a smiling face.

Sramana "Please do follow me to our store rooms and kitchen. They are all open for you."

A dozen Brahamans get up quickly and follow the boy-monk inside.

Scene 10

Monastery: Interior **Sramana, 12 Brahmans**

The Sramana takes the Brahamans to the store rooms and the kitchen. The Brahmans search for rice, ghee, candy and vegetables. All the big earthen pots and vessels and bags are empty. The kitchen pots and vessels are also empty. Deeply embarrassed, they come out, followed by the Sramana.

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Scene 11

Verandah **Yasas, Brhamans**

Coming out of the interior, the Brahmans sit down silently before Yasas.

1st Brahman *"Holy Sthavira ! How are you going to feed the thousands when you have nothing in your stores. How do you feed the monks everyday ?"*

Yasas "Thousands of monks by now are begging for a morsel of grain from door to door. When they will come back in the evening, they will boil their handful of grain and eat. That is what they do everyday. Any surplus food is given to the hungry and the needy or the destitutes who come for charity. This is what the Sakyamuni Buddha used to do everyday to feed the monks."

2nd Brahman "If this is what you do to feed yourselves, why does our beloved Emperor donate your Sangha crores from the royal treasury ?"

Yasas "Yes, the Beloved of the Gods donates crores upon crores to be distributed to hundreds and thousands of monasteries from the Himalayas to the seas to serve the teeming humanity. The wealth is spent for the sick and the distressed, for the old and the orphans, for men and animals, for planting of trees and cultivation of herbs, for laying of roads and running for inns, for the treatment of the sick in thousands of charitable dispensaries, for attending upon the disabled and the widows, the dying and the abandoned, for the lowly and the weak, for the victims of famines and calamities, and for countless other purposes for mankind's benefit, for the moral elevation of humanity through service and Dharma. The Sangha receives donations for the cause of others."

The Brahmans look sad. Some of them wipe out their tears. Some prostrate themselves at the feet of the Sthavira.

Brahmans "We beg forgiveness, Your Holiness. You have removed from our eyes the veil of ignorance."

They chant in unison "Jayatu Devanam Priya Priyadarshi Raja Asoka."

Scene 12

Asoka's Hermitage **Asoka, Karuvaki, Monks, Maids**

Karuvaki is serving meal to Asoka on a gold plate. He takes a little of rice and looks at the sitting monks.

Asoka "A Bhikshu is required to eat on earthen pots, not on gold plates. But Karuvaki says I am an Emperor."

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Karuvaki "Deavanam Priya ! You are the real Bhikshu in your thought, but yet an Emperor in action."

Asoka "If I am an Emperor in action, let me have the right to command as I please."

He waves his hand at the sitting monks who come near.

Asoka "Noble Bhikshus ! I donate this gold throne of mine and these gold plates to your monastery. Carry these away from this cottage of Asoka. It is an Emperor's order."

Karuvaki stands perplexed. The monks get up to action, and with their collective efforts carry out the huge heavy throne as well as the gold plates from the Emperor's shelter Asoka looks towards Karuvaki.

Asoka "You know, I have announced my decision to donate my Empire to the Buddhist Sangha !"

Karuvaki "Yes, I have heard of this great desire."

Asoka "Karuvaki ! Asoka will not die in peace if this solemn promise is not kept. See to it that I remain true to my word. My days are coming to an end, my dear !"

Asoka complains of chest pain and lies down on mat to sleep. Karuvaki begins to chant a hymn.

Scene 13

Palace Courtyard **Samprati, Monks**

While entering to the palace courtyard on horseback, Prince Samprati observes from a distance how several monks are carrying away the imperial throne from inside Asoka's cottage. He rides near to them and gets down.

Samprati "Wise Souls ! It is not only the throne of the Emperor which you have to carry away as donation, but the whole Empire of Magadh which my grandfather has donated to the Sangha. I ask you to request the Heads of the Asokarama and Kukkutarama monasteries to come to the treasury tomorrow to receive the promised gift of the Emperor from my hand."

The monks leave the place delighted.

Scene 14

Treasury Hall **Prince Samprati, Yasas, 10 Head Monks, Treasurer**

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Prince Samprati is seen seated on a throne inside the spacious Treasury Hall of the palace. Behind his throne stands the treasurer. Yasas and 10 Head Monks take their seats in front of the Vice-Gerent.

Samprati — "Noble Bhikshus ! I have invited you to the palace to let you know that the Emperor has decided to donate his whole Empire to the Buddhist Sangha. He must keep his solemn promise, and I as his Vice-Gerent shall carry out his order. May I now request you please to receive the Empire as the gift from Emperor Asoka."

Yasas — "Blessed be the Vice-Gerent, the worthy successor of the Devanam Priya Priyadarshi Raja. This donation will surely change the character of the Mauryan Empire by transforming it to a spiritual realm of virtue and righteousness."

Samprati — "Sthavira Yasas ! Before the Empire passes to your holy hands, would you be pleased to remove certain doubts from the mind of the ministers and of the subjects ?"

1st Monk — "Uparajan ! May we know of the doubts !"

Samprati — "In what service will you engage the vast army of the Empire containing ten lakhs of soldiers who know only to ride horses and elephants and to play arms and swords ?"

The monks look at each other and keep silent.

Samprati — "In what way would you utilise these thousands upon thousands of policemen, officers and royal employees who are an integral part of the Empire ?"

Yasas quickly intervenes before the Prince puts further questions.

Yasas — "Aryaputra ! We have to go by the noble intention of the Beloved of the Gods. By donation of the Empire, he means the donation of the price of the Empire in terms of gold coins."

Monks (*in one voice*) — "We agree with the explanation of Sthavira Yasas."

Samprati — "I also agree with his wise words. Let us, therefore, fix a price for the Empire. May I ascertain from you the price of the snow-covered Himalayan Mountains extending from the west to the east ? May I know the price of the inaccessible Vindhyan Ranges full of wild animals ? What are the prices of the rivers Sindhu, Ganga, Yamuna, Brahmaputra, Kaveri, Krishna, Godavari, Narmada and Mahanadi ? What is the price of the rocky plateaus of the vast Dakshinapatha ? What are the prices of the dense forests and hilltracts of Madhya Bharat and Kalinga ? What are the prices of the great deserts in the west ? May I hear from your noble souls the prices of all these physical features of this far-flung Empire"

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Confused and puzzled, the monks discuss among themselves in whispers to the amusement of the Prince.

Samprati "Do suggest any amount you like in view of the lands and landscapes!"

Yasas "Four crores of gold coins !"

Samprati "I accept your valued suggestion. I now suggest that you first accept the Empire as the Emperor's donation by receiving from my hand this royal sceptre as the symbol of the Empire. Next you sell the Empire to me by giving back the sceptre and taking from me the price of the Empire as fixed by you, namely, four crores of gold coins".

Monks (*in unison*) "Jayatu Uparaja, the noble Prince Samprati".

Samprati gets up from the throne and hands over the sceptre to the monks who receive it together. The monks thereafter hand back the sceptre to the Prince. He receives it and turns to the treasuer.

Samprati "Treasurer ! Pay to the noble monks four crores of gold coins in my presence."

Huge chests are lifted by the guards and are placed before the monks. Samprati observes their happy faces.

Samprati "Go to the ailing Emperor and tell him that you have received his whole Empire as a donation to the Sangha. May he feel happy that his promise has been fulfilled."

Scene 15

Asoka's Hermitage **Asoka, Karuvaki, A Monk**

Emperor Asoka is lying on the floor on his mat. Karuvaki brings to him an earthen pot containing a mango fruit, cut into halves. With considerable strain Asoka lifts one piece of the fruit from the pot to eat and gives back the pot to Karuvaki. His eyes suddenly catch a monk standing at the door. He waves his hand to him. The monk comes near to the Emperor and kneels down before him.

Monk "I am from the Kukkutarama monastery to receive your charity."

Asoka (*in feeble voice*) "Your Emperor has nothing with him to give to you except this half of a fruit. Take this as the last gift of Asoka to the Sangha."

He struggles to extend his hand to the earthen pot containing half a mango. Taking it to his hand, he gives it to the monk.

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Slowly Asoka mutters the words "Buddham Saranam Gachchhami, Dharmam Saranam Gachchami, Sangham Saranam Gachchhami" He closes his eyes. His breathes no more.

Scene 16

Bank of Ganga

Before an endless humanity on the bank of Holy Ganga, the flames of the funeral pyre rise to the sky. As the mortal remains of Asoka turn into ashes, the surging congegation bursts into tears, raising the voice to pray "Om Shantih, Shantih, Shantih."

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